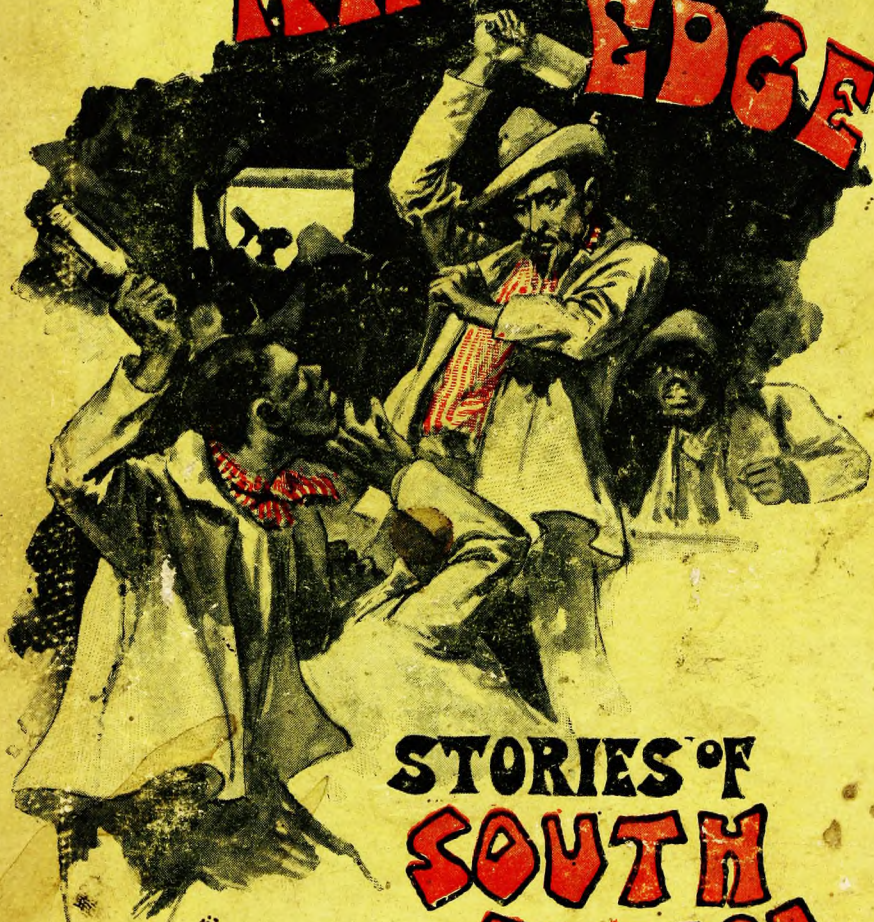


THE

RAGGED EDGE

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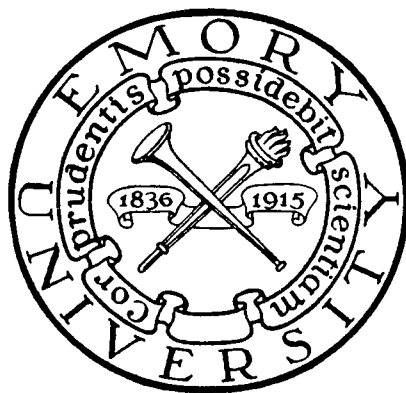


STORIES OF
SOUTH
AFRICA

BY

ANNA, COMTESSE DE BRÉMONT.

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THE RAGGED EDGE

STORIES OF SOUTH AFRICA

BY

ANNA, COUNTESS DE BRÉMONT

AUTHOR OF "THE GENTLEMAN DIGGER," ETC.

NEW EDITION

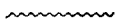
DOWNEY & CO., LIMITED

12 YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON

To
MY OLD FRIENDS
OF
THE RAND

PREFACE

TO THE NEW EDITION.



The moment is propitious for the re-issue of these stories "of real life" in South Africa.

War, red-handed, relentless, is rampant in many of the scenes and places herein depicted.

Suffering, bloodshed, and death will purge the Transvaal of the Curse of the Canteen. Vanquished for ever, let us hope, will be the Scalawag Journalist who sells the freedom of the press for golden place-money.

The Uitlander will be off the Ragged Edge of his grievances, and official corruption no longer the persecutor of the good-natured but Ubiquitous Jew-boy.

The sons of Nell and Kitty will have no need to carry their millions to London.

For—

When Britain rings the bugle-call of victory, it will resound over a new Transvaal!

ANNA DE BRÉMONT

(*Née* DUNPHIE).

London, October, 1899.

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THE RAGGED EDGE



PART I

‘DEAR God! will there never be an end to this?’

‘It appears not, my Nell. We’ve come to the end of everything else but our bad luck!’

The man laughed harshly, and helped himself to another drink of whisky from the bottle on the table at his elbow.

‘Dear God! dear God! dear God!’ murmured the girl with dreary reiteration, as though keeping time to the listless motion of one small foot hanging over the side of the rough deal table on which she was perched. Her slight figure took up little room on her improvised seat, as convenient as it was original, since there was no

chair in this shabby room other than that on which her companion sprawled lazily.

‘Will there—ever—be—an—end—to this?’ she repeated, emphasising each word by bringing her hand down with a bang on the table.

The man appeared indifferent to her vehemence. He gave no response, but puffed away at his pipe with renewed energy, sending a faint glow through the smouldering ashes therein.

Nell’s dejected mien became more dejected. Her pretty mouth drooped like a half-wilted rose, whilst her big grey eyes seemed brimming with tears that never fell, as her gaze wandered over the room, carpetless and bare of furniture save the bed in one corner, the table and solitary chair.

An old, gaudily-coloured Kaffir blanket served as a drapery to the window. Perfectly guiltless of paint or varnish were the plank walls, which reflected, in fantastic figures, Nell’s distorted shadow cast by the dull light of the oil lamp on the table, where she rocked backwards and forwards in a nervous effort to keep down an occasional sob.

Although Nell had just returned from 'The Camp,' as Johannesburg was called in those early mining days, her companion said nothing on the subject of the business on which she had gone.

The first glance at her sweet face, as she burst into the shanty and without removing hat or jacket jumped into her favourite seat, closed his lips, for he knew that she had been unsuccessful in her voluntary mission.

Suddenly a rush of wind swept round the shanty, shaking it to its frail foundations, rousing the man from his brooding, and startling Nell out of her approaching fit of hysterics.

'Thank God! you've escaped that Nell. There is a storm coming on that will last till morning,' he exclaimed, with evident relief at the interruption which enabled him to escape from his thoughts, and delay at least for the time, Nell's disclosures.

'You must be hungry, little woman; I'll forage for a bit of supper for you.' He arose and, turning up the light a trifle higher, observed with an attempt at gaiety,—'I must be quick about it, or you'll have to eat by the

light of the moon, love! That's the last of the oil!'

'Thank you, Jack,' said the girl, with a note of tenderness in her voice that was not lost upon the other as he opened a door behind him, which revealed an inner room—a sort of half outhouse and kitchen combined. 'Don't trouble, dearest, I'm not a bit hungry,' Nell called after him. Then, as another terrible gust of wind dashed against the shanty, she exclaimed,—'Oh! I am glad I got back before the storm. It would have been too horrible to be caught in that awful whirlwind of dust. I should have been lost down one of the mining pits, or have tumbled into a slit in the dark. The moon was rising when I left "Camp," but I knew by the smell in the air that a storm was coming up, so I tore along, ran nearly all the way, and got here just in time.'

This speech seemed to rouse Nell from her melancholy. She jumped from her perch on the table and threw her hat on the bed; her jacket next followed to keep it company, then

she turned her attention to a small fragment of looking-glass, which in lieu of a frame was ingeniously supported against the wall by a couple of old horseshoes, and proceeded to arrange her tumbled golden hair with the aid of a brush and comb suspended in a wall-pocket beneath this improvised mirror.

Nell's greatest charm was her wonderful hair. It fell like a glittering veil over her shoulders as she took out the hairpins, which she placed between her teeth for lack of a more appropriate place. The dull rays of the lamp seemed to catch a momentary brightness from those sunny tresses.

She made a sweet picture in the dingy room, as she stood for a moment with the glittering mass coiled around her uplifted hands, her slender neck bent forward, and every curve of her pretty figure, from the gently swelling bust to rounded hips and lissom limb, distinctly outlined beneath her shabby gown.

The picture was not lost upon Jack, who had been hurriedly arranging the supper, and it smote his heart to the quick as he thought of

the faithful love of this fair young creature who preferred to half starve with him rather than exchange her squalid surroundings for the comfort, nay luxury, which awaited her at any moment in the Camp should she abandon him. He had been harsh with her now and then almost to brutality when in the drunken fits brought on by his continuous bad luck. The thought smote him again with a twinge of shame, and, moved by a tender impulse, he suddenly pressed his lips to the nape of her white neck in a kiss.

‘You old silly!’ said Nell, giving him a rap over the shoulders with the hair-brush, although her cheeks flamed for a moment with pleasure at the unexpected caress.

This little exchange of love-making over, Jack proceeded to arrange the tin platter, which did service for a plate, and the coarse metal knife and fork—the kind of table ware used by the miners in those days—on the table. Then flinging the old towel, with which he had cleaned up the foregoing, over his arm, he struck an attitude, and with all the grace of a Piccadilly waiter, announced,—

‘Supper is served, my lady.’

Nell’s eyes brightened with a smile at Jack’s clever imitation of a waiter, as she took the chair which he offered with affected politeness.

‘Dear old Jack,’ she said as she sat down. ‘You are so clever. Ah! why did you leave the stage?’ and her eyes dimmed again.

‘Let the stage go to the devil!’ he cried roughly. Then, in a softer tone, ‘There, eat your supper, little woman, then let me hear what happened in Camp, and how those brutes received you.’

Without further delay, Nell set about enjoying the very curious supper laid before her. It was made up of a variety of half empty tins containing an assortment of delicacies in the shape of *pâté-de-fois-gras*, asparagus, tongue, galantine of chicken and biscuits—the usual fare of the Camp, owing to the scarcity of fresh meat and vegetables. Nell ate ravenously of this feast.

‘I say, Jack, how did you manage it? This *pâté* is delicious—um, it’s just scrumptious,’ she said between every mouthful. ‘I declare I

never suspected I had such an appetite—I am as hungry as a Kaffir!’

‘Go ahead, little woman, and enjoy yourself. You won’t have such a feed in another fortnight. I “jumped” the whole blooming lot from Monty’s shanty whilst you were away. He’s just laid in a new store of stuff from Kimberley—the waggon was unloading whilst I was there, so he’s none the worse.’ Then, with a sudden affectation of haste, he offered to help her to some whisky and soda, saying, ‘Allow me—say when!’

‘Jack, put down that towel this minute!’ cried Nell, laughing, ‘and stop playing the waiter, or I shall choke; you are too funny for anything. Oh, why *did* you leave the stage?’

‘There you go again, Nell,’ retorted he impatiently, as he flung aside the towel and dropped his assumed character. Then pushing a box forward, he sat down and leaned his elbows on the table, his whole manner changed as he stared moodily at the girl. ‘Why do you drag up the stage at every moment, and throw it in my face? You know better than any-

one else my reasons for giving it up. I was a fool, no doubt, to chuck it, and sink all my pile in this damned stand; but I wanted to get rich too fast — for your sake, Nell — and you know it. Then why make me feel the bitterness of all this miserable failure over and over again by throwing the stage into my face!’

Nell grew very grave during this vehement speech. She laid down her knife and fork, and, pushing aside the platter, said quietly,—

‘I am sorry, Jack, dearie, if I wound you—but —something must be done to keep us from starvation, and the stage is now the only thing you have to fall back upon.’

‘And a pretty chance I have to get back to it at present!’ exclaimed Jack, ‘with every company in South Africa gone to smash through these-infernal bad times. Even Jones, the most blackguardly fraud in the Transvaal, can’t keep afloat the cheap company he has brought out here—a disgraceful lot which he trumped up from all the stage-door-hangers-on and doubtful actresses in London. They are a

dead frost, with all their show of legs and diamonds.'

Nell made no reply as Jack rose and stamped about the room in a fever of impatience. Her eyes followed him with a look of pity, and she began to nervously toy with the solitary bangle on her wrist. But she made no attempt to interrupt his speech or soothe his mood.

'I tell you, Nell, it is no use—no earthly use my—of thinking of the stage. All that is left me to do is to hang on to this stand, to work it with whatever machinery I can beg, borrow or steal, until I get enough quartz to pan out a decent show of gold. Then I'll get plenty of help in the way of shareholders.'

Here Jack broke off and, with a change of voice and manner, sat down opposite Nell. He stretched forth his hand and took hers with a return of tenderness, as he said,—

'Why — Nell, darling — I thought I would keep the secret a little longer—but—Nell—I cannot. I turned out enough gold yesterday from that shaky old battery to justify all our hopes. Oh! if I could only get a ten-stamp

battery, I would float the mine in a month—so don't say anything more about stage business to me.'

Nell's face grew pale although her heart jumped with joy at the news of this happy consummation of all the past weary months of Jack's patient work. She had done her share, by parting with her jewels and trinkets, to keep the old battery in fuel, and now a feeling of despair crept over her although she spoke quietly enough.

'I am glad to hear something has come of your work, Jack—and—shall I tell you what I did in Camp?'

'You take the good news very coolly, little woman,' said Jack, dropping her hand in his disappointment. 'But that does not matter. Go on.'

'I met with no success at Height's,' began Nell in a low tone. 'The flashy barmaid from London got the place. Billy brought her over, and she arrived by the coach yesterday.' Then with a sob,—'I was terribly disappointed. I was sure old Height would give the place to me.

I felt like coming straight back, but the thought of how badly you need money gave me courage, then I applied at the Bodega with no success; they are reducing the staff. Next I called in at Billings' Chambers to see Frank for you, but he had gone to Kimberley for a fortnight. But Gubbins was in Camp, and on the chance of getting a loan from him I waited four hours until he turned up. I begged him to help you. He is a good sort, Jack, for he seemed much distressed because he could not oblige you. He has no money till Frank returns from Kimberley, and declares that he is living on "tick" at the Grand. Then—oh, Jack!

Here Nell completely broke down and, resting her head on the table, burst into tears.

'My poor Nell! don't fret,' said Jack, trying to soothe her. 'Don't cry! You need rest. Go to bed and forget all about this bother and worry until to-morrow.'

'No, no!' sobbed Nell, 'I must tell you all—the worst is yet to come—it is that which is breaking my heart. If you had not found the gold—I would not care—'

‘The worst? What do you mean, Nell?’

‘Gubbins told me to tell you so that you might not be taken unawares. He told me that—oh! Jack!—Jack!—that the licence of your stand is over-due, and Ike Simonson has paid up and is coming to ‘Jump’ this place to-morrow!’

‘My God!’ gasped Jack, ‘it is only too true, and I have not a shilling to save what has cost me all that I had in the world to secure. I never supposed that my stand would attract those money-sucking Jews, who pounce on a stand the moment it is forfeited—and just as I find the first grains of gold! Oh, God! what’s to be done? what’s to be done?’

‘You have until noon to-morrow to pay up—to settle with Simonson,’ said Nell, terrified out of her sobbing by the man’s despair.

‘Pay up—with what?’ cried Jack, stung to fury by the knowledge of his helplessness. ‘Oh, Nell! Nell! we are on the ragged edge, and there is nothing for us to do but to sink into the depths of ruin and despair—slink out of sight like dogs, and die anywhere—anywhere. Oh, God! what’s to be done?’

During this scene the storm raging outside had lashed itself into a furious gale, which shook the building like a tinder-box. It tore at the roof and window with terrific force, and sent bang after bang on the door. The tumult in Jack's mind rendered him oblivious to the tumult without, until a louder and stronger bang caught his ear at last. He listened a moment, and then beckoned Nell to his side.

'There's someone at the door,' she whispered, as she drew close to him. 'I'm frightened, Jack.'

'It's only the storm,' said Jack. 'The wind is blowing a hurricane—ah! there it is again! Yes, that is someone knocking—one of the boys from the Jumper's mine caught in the storm—I'll let him in.'

Suiting the action to the word, Jack strode to the door and pulled back the bolt. A man lurched heavily forward into the room and before Jack had time to invite him to enter the door burst open beneath the man's weight, and he sprawled on the floor.

'Why don't you let a fellow in?' growled the

man, as he staggered to his feet. 'I have been knocking at this confounded door for an hour. Why don't you let a fellow in?'

Jack was not disturbed by the gruff insolence of the intruder, as he saw at the first glance that he was under the influence of a too generous supply of whisky. He also recognised him as a well-known mining expert, a man of rough but honest ways, who travelled much in his capacity of expert from mine to mine, and who was no doubt on his road to some mine near by when he lost his way in the storm.

'That's all right, MacPherson,' said Jack sociably, as he assisted him to a seat on the chair. 'Sit down; make yourself at home. It is a beastly night. Will you have a whisky?'

'Of course I'll have a drink if there is any to be got in this hole-end of the earth. It'll work some of that damned sand out of my throat. Ugh!'

He lurched heavily backwards and forwards in his effort to sit steady, and, as he took the glass of whisky, looked at Jack with a stupid stare, whilst he spluttered out the words,—

‘Who the devil are you, anyhow? I don’t remember your face. What’s your name?’

‘Williamson,’ answered Jack, as he helped himself sparingly to the whisky.

‘Williamson?’ repeated the other; ‘why, that’s the name of the Johnnie whose claim Ike Simonson jumped. Are you the fellow?’

‘I’m the man,’ answered Jack, his brow darkening.

MacPherson appeared disconcerted for a moment, then he blurted out with drunken candour,—

‘Well, I’ll be square. I was looking for this identical stand when I was caught in the storm. I told my partner I was going by coach to Pretoria for a day or two, to put him off his guard—I don’t let him know all my biz—and I started to look up these diggings before Ike came in the morning. Any gold about?—for if there is, I’ll buy him off and give you a bonus.’

‘You’ll have to find that out yourself,’ said Jack gruffly, as he realised the true business of his guest.

‘Oh, I say, no offence. Would you make me

a shake-down till morning, and we can arrange matters then—to our mutual satisfaction, you bet.’

Meanwhile Nell had retired to the darkest corner of the room, to avoid the man, whose condition filled her with disgust. She hoped he would leave without seeing her, or fall asleep till morning, but Jack’s request for her to make a temporary bed or shake-down of a blanket and kaross on the floor, brought her out of her corner

‘Hello! who have we here?’ exclaimed MacPherson, as Nell proceeded to follow out Jack’s order. ‘What a devilish fine girl you are, to be sure,’ he said, with a leer at Nell; and then, with a wink at Jack, ‘Your missus, I suppose?’

‘Yes,’ answered Jack, curtly.

‘Then you are a lucky duffer.’

‘No compliments, if you please,’ said Jack, in a tone which warned the man, drunk as he was, to be careful.

MacPherson had sense enough left to heed the voice and look, and, with a cunning affectation of indifference, turned his attention to the tumbler of whisky, which he drank off, but without re-

moving his gaze from Nell. Then he looked at the bottle, and, seeing that it was empty, clamoured for another drink. The ruse was successful, as Jack, impatient to get him to sleep and out of the way, left the room to look for a possible bottle amid the empty store outside.

The next moment Nell, who was busily arranging the improvised couch on the floor, felt herself imprisoned in a pair of arms, whilst a shower of rude kisses made a disgusting onslaught over her face and neck. For an instant her fright overcame her and she could make no resistance. Then the embrace became closer, and she realised the dreadful purpose of the drunken libertine, and with all her strength she sought to free herself from MacPherson before Jack returned.

With womanly instinct she wished to spare Jack the sight of the insult offered to her, and prevent the terrible consequences should he discover MacPherson's conduct. But her struggles were of no avail, and a sickening sensation crept over her as she felt her strength failing.

In another second she would be lost, desecrated by the brutal passion of the man who held her in his strong embrace. One last effort to free her hands, which he had pinioned to her sides with his arm. But it was useless. The wretch only tightened his hold, his foul lips sought hers; she could keep silence no longer. Half fainting, she gasped wildly,—

‘ Jack—Jack—save me ! ’

Her cry was followed by the sound of a crash in the outer room. Jack rushed in, to stand for an instant paralysed with astonishment at the sight of MacPherson with Nell in his arms. Then all the blood in his body rushed to his head, and he dashed at MacPherson with a shout of rage.

His strong fingers closed over the throat of the miscreant, who, on his side, was determined not to yield Nell up. It was a terrible moment for the poor girl. MacPherson tightened his hold until her heart almost ceased to beat. He was mad now with drink and passion, and resolved to possess her at any cost.

But the clutch of Jack’s fingers closed like a

grip of steel. MacPherson's face grew purple whilst his eyes seemed starting from his head. Then at last he released Nell, only to throw one arm round Jack's waist, whilst with the other he encircled his neck in a vice-like grip. It was now a silent and deadly fight between the two men.

Nell sank faint and giddy on the shake-down, the room swam round and round, and for a few seconds she lost consciousness. A crash aroused her. It was the falling of the table, and she was just in time to put out the flame of the over-turned lamp. In the darkness she heard Jack's voice calling hoarsely,—

‘Nell—Nell—open the door!’

With tottering steps she groped for the door, and, drawing the bolt, threw it wide open. A flood of pale golden light filled the room, for the storm of wind and dust had passed, and the moon was full in the cloudless sky.

The light revealed the upturned faces of the men; MacPherson's swollen and purple, with a deadly glare in the projecting eyes, Jack's white and fixed, with a look that made

Nell shudder and bury her face in her hands as she cowered behind the door.

She did not dare to look again, but she could hear their laboured breathing, as she men reeled and rocked, stumbled and tore through the room in their terrible combat. She heard them struggle out through the door and over the veld, then the sound of their feet tearing up the loose soil. Once a hoarse cry smote her ear, then groans, and gradually all grew still with that death-like silence of the desert veld.

How long she crouched there in the shadow of the door, trying to murmur a prayer, and motionless with terror, she knew not. It might have been hours, and it might have been but a few moments, when the sound of Jack's voice aroused her.

‘Nell!’ he called, ‘where are you?’

She stirred, and he was by her side.

‘Nell—Nell!’ he whispered.

His voice had a note of fear and awe in it. Nell knew what had happened. She rose and, putting her hand on his breast, answered,—

‘Jack!’

'Are you game, Nell?'

'I am!' she said steadily.

'Then come—quick—for God's sake!'

But he paused and took her face between his hands. They were moist with a sticky substance that made Nell shudder, but she did not move her face.

'Look at me in the eyes, Nell!' he said.

She returned his gaze unflinchingly.

'I have killed him. God! I am a murderer! Will you stand by me?'

A violent spasm of trembling seized upon him, and he almost sank to the ground, but Nell's sustaining arms upheld him. Then he burst into a paroxysm of weeping. The sight restored all Nell's courage.

'No, Jack—you are no murderer!' she said, calmly and firmly. 'You killed him in self-defence. He would have killed you and done worse than kill me.'

'We must bury him at once—cover up this night's work—for no one would believe that it was a fair fight. I'm too poor to defend myself. Oh, Nell, I would never have done for

him if he had left you alone ; but to insult you—to try to drag you down to the level of those painted drabs that haunt the canteens ! My Nell, my poor, little, true-hearted Nell, whose only fault is loving me ! I have been a drunken brute to you sometimes, Nell, but I have loved you through it all, and I'll make an honest woman of you after this night. No man could blame me for protecting you and giving the wretch a beating ; but—Nell—oh, God ! I did not mean to kill him !'

'No man would blame you, Jack,' said Nell, soothingly. 'He brought his fate upon himself. Where is he, Jack ?'

'I dragged him to the sluit—we must bury him there. Give me some whisky first, Nell, if there is any left ; my heart is like water.'

Jack staggered to the chair, whilst Nell groped for the matchbox on the wall against the window, and went into the other room, not daring to strike a light through fear of attracting some wandering Kaffirs on the veld. How still and cold the little chamber seemed. As the match flickered in her fingers, ghostly shadows

seemed to start up around her. A half-empty bottle of whisky rewarded her search, the one Jack had dropped on the floor when he heard her cry.

‘My last drink,’ he said, as Nell gave him the tumbler. ‘I’ll never trust myself to drink again after this night’s work.’

‘Come,’ urged Nell, ‘we have no time to lose!’

Together they went forth into the moonlight, Jack leading the way across the veld in the direction of his small workshop, beside the deep sluit. The night was exceedingly still. No house was visible, and the storm had frightened away any prowlers. Far in the distance loomed, like ghostly masts at sea, the shafts of the Langgaargte Mine.

There was not a single kopje in sight to relieve the monotony of the silvery horizon, or conceal a lurking witness of the strange movements of the pair.

The sluit was some little distance from the shanty, and as they neared it Nell’s eye quickly discerned a motionless heap near the edge

She knew what it was and her heart sank for a moment, only to rise again with renewed courage to meet the dreadful task before her.

The dead man lay on his back, the face distorted and the eyes half-closed, whilst a thin line of blood was beginning to tinge the swollen lips and protruding tongue.

‘We must be quick about it,’ said Jack in a low, hoarse voice. ‘Lift the head, Nell. Don’t let it drag on the veld. I’ll do the rest.’

Nell, with white, set lips, prepared to obey Jack’s instructions, when he stopped her, saying,—

‘I must take off the outer garments; it will remove all chance of identification—the asvogels will do the rest!’

Jack had now regained his courage, and with steady hands soon removed the coat, vest, trousers and boots. Then together they lifted the body and rolled it over into the sluit. It sank without a sound on the soft bed of the sluit, and lay there with upturned face, an easy bait for the hideous birds of prey whose raven-

ous beaks would soon destroy what was left of the unfortunate MacPherson, before the sun rose and the rains came to wash away the bones.

When the shanty was reached, and the door carefully bolted and barred, Jack set about finding a place of concealment for the dead man's clothes. He dared not make a light, but trusted to the moon-rays which filtered through the chinks of door and window.

'What shall we do with them, Nell?' he cried, at his wits' end. 'They are sure to be found, if any search is made here.'

'I will take them into Camp concealed under my cloak,' said Nell; 'or, better still, burn them, as soon as day breaks, in the engine-house.'

'But I have no fuel, and if I borrow some, that would betray us; besides, Simonson will be here early.'

'Better take the clothes away with us,' said Nell, 'than risk discovery of them here, for don't you remember he said he told his partner he was going to Pretoria, so it will be some days before he is missed, and we can get away to Durban

and thence to England, where no one will find us should the body—'

Nell's speech was cut short by an exclamation from Jack.

'What is it?' she gasped.

No reply came from Jack, and she groped round in the darkness to find him.

'Nell!' he cried, 'Nell, I've found a bag of gold—oh, my God—a bag of gold!'

'Where?' whispered Nell,

'In the trousers pocket!' cried Jack, wildly.

'Let me feel it,' answered Nell.

Jack, guided by the voice, found her and placed the precious bag in her hand.

'But is it really gold?' faltered Nell.

'Look!' cried Jack, holding up a gold piece in the thin ray of moonlight shining through the window, as he carefully pulled aside the blanket.

Nell's eyes opened wide in the darkness to drink in the welcome sight.

'We are rich now—*rich*, Nell, and we can get away to-morrow. I'll leave the claim and everything else. There is enough in this bag to take us anywhere we wish to go.'

‘No, Jack,’ said Nell, ‘we’ll not run away; but to-morrow you will pay the forfeit to Simonson, pay the stand tax and work your claim yourself. Then you can burn the poor man’s clothes; no one can ask questions when you have the money to buy fuel, and there will be no risk of discovery, for you can buy the stand where the sluit lies. Oh, thank God! we shall be off the ragged edge at last!’

‘No, my Nell,’ said Jack, sadly, ‘I’ll never be off the ragged edge now. I have taken a man’s life, and now his gold. I’ll never be off the ragged edge of remorse—never! God help me!’

PART II

THINGS looked different the next morning when Jack went into Camp, and paid the taxes and bought over Ike Simonson. No one asked any questions, not even Gubbins, who, if he did think of the matter, set it down to Nell’s success in borrowing from someone else.

It was the turning point in Jack's fortunes, for, with the hundred golden sovereigns found in the dead man's bag, he bought up the adjoining stand containing the fatal sluit, and it turned out to be one of the richest veins of gold on the reef.

His first step was to purchase a small battery, with which he realised enough crushings to start a company and float his mine. Then he took Nell to Durban and quietly married her, and set up housekeeping in a modest way in Camp.

Suddenly the great boom arose which set Johannesburg mad with the gold frenzy, and sent shares up into the thousands. Jack Williamson found himself a rich man—rich beyond all his wildest dreams—in six months from the night on which he had rolled MacPherson's body into the sluit.

The sluit kept its secret well, for there was never a whisper as to the whereabouts of MacPherson. Jack avoided the dead man's partner, who, on his side, seemed to have forgotten all about the absent expert.

As Jack prospered, he developed a tendency to church-going and almsgiving, which no one understood but Nell. She had become one of the belles of the Camp. Her beauty and gentle manners won over the wife of the rector of the fashionable church at which they attended. Even old Height seemed oblivious of the fact that she had applied to him for the position of barmaid, or it may be that he never dreamed of the brilliant Mrs Williamson and the other being the same person. Nell in her new surroundings was quite safe from any such suspicion. Gubbins and the other friends of Jack's in the secret of Nell's former position wisely held their tongues.

One day, during the height of the boom, Jack and a party of brokers left the Exchange and repaired to the Bodega opposite, to have a bottle of champagne over a sale of shares.

Jack was in the midst of an exciting discussion on the relative merits of two rival mines, when he looked across the room, and there, standing by the bar on the other side, was the ghost of MacPherson.

The words froze on Jack's lips. The room spun round and round, and the next instant he fell like a log to the floor.

When he recovered from what was only a fainting spell of a few moments, he dared not trust himself to open his eyes, but he could hear quite plainly all that was going on. Someone was speaking quite near him, and this was what he was saying,—

‘Yes; I had a close shave. If the old Boer had not come along with his bullock-waggon that morning, I wouldn't have been here to tell the tale.’ Jack trembled for some undefinable reason as he listened. ‘I started out to hunt up a stand,’ continued the speaker, ‘and got lost in the storm. I don't remember anything else until I found myself in the Boer's waggon on the road to Mashonaland. His story is that I was lying in a sluit, and his dog discovered me, and that I had been attacked and robbed by Kaffirs, who threw me into the sluit and made off as he approached down the Natal Road. Well—I'm alive and kicking—here's to you and to my find in Mashona-

land—best gold country in Africa, take my tip.' ”

Jack Williamson slowly opened his eyes and gave a long, deep breath of relief. He was soon himself again, and apparently none the worse for his attack.

‘Heart, Jack,’ said one; ‘you are working too hard—getting rich too fast.’

‘What is that fellow saying about Mashonaland?’ he said, pointing to MacPherson.

‘He is MacPherson, the expert; I’ll call him up and he will tell you.’

Jack braced himself for the ordeal, but there was no look of recognition in the expert’s face as he was introduced to the man who had left him for dead in the sluit and prospered on his gold. MacPherson readily fell to talking of his newly-discovered mine, but he was in need of money to open it up. .

‘Put me down for five hundred shares,’ said Jack, ‘and come to my office for a cheque to-morrow morning.’

‘Thank you, Mr Williamson,’ said Mac-

Pherson. 'You have done me a good turn, and you'll not lose by it.'

Jack made no reply as he left the Bodega and sauntered across to the Exchange.

That evening he said nothing of his discovery, when Nell met him, smiling and radiant, at dinner.

'Why worry the little woman,' thought Jack, as he returned her caress. 'MacPherson remembers nothing of that terrible night, and there is no possibility of his meeting with Nell. I'll help him off to Mashonaland to work the mine, and then—well, Nell and I will take a trip round the world, and so good-bye to Africa for ever.'

When Jack retired that night, he kissed his wife with more than his usual tenderness, and his last thought was a prayer of thankfulness that now he could lay his head on his pillow in peace, free from the ghost of a guilty conscience.

On his arrival at his office the next morning, Jack found MacPherson awaiting him. The latter was consumed with impatience

since, to tell the truth, he feared Jack would repent of his offer, which MacPherson knew was more than generous. But Jack kept his word, and, after the necessary arrangements, MacPherson had the satisfaction of knowing that the cheque was safely secured in his pocket-book.

Everything having been settled to MacPherson's delight and Jack's secret relief, that the former should start at once for Mashona, he was about to say good-bye, when a smart rattle of wheels was heard outside, and as the office was on the ground floor, the sound was almost immediately followed by a knock at the door.

Jack knew the knock, and he arose with beating heart to answer the summons. But before he could reach the door it was thrown open, and revealed Nell standing on the stoop or doorstep. She was in the room ere he had time to give her a warning gesture.

'Jack!' she exclaimed, 'I want you to come out and look at the new ponies; they are

such beauties. Oh! I beg pardon. I did not know you were engaged,' she hastened to say, as she caught sight of MacPherson, who had started from his chair at the sound of her voice.

There was a pause as these two stood face to face, whilst Jack seemed to have lost his voice, so terrible was his struggle to keep control of himself should MacPherson recognise Nell. He grew deathly pale, and his eyes rested on the expert's face with the glare of those of a wild animal brought to bay.

MacPherson passed his hand once or twice over his head like one who is suddenly confronted with some problem which the brain refuses to unravel. If it was a perplexing moment for the expert, it was an awful moment for Jack, since he understood the struggle going on in the other's mind in his effort to recall where and when he had heard that voice calling 'Jack,' or seen that lovely face in its frame of golden hair.

But dissipation had already done its work on MacPherson's brain before that night of the

fight in the shanty, and, aided by the shock and illness which followed, the result was that all memory of his encounter with Nell and Jack had been obliterated from his mind.

Nell, on her side, betrayed no signs of recognition, for two reasons, one, that she supposed the man before her to be dead, and the other, that she could not have identified his face, now the picture of rude health, with the one she had last looked upon, swollen and disfigured, as it lay on the bottom of the sluit.

‘I believe—I have—I thought I knew this lady,’ stammered MacPherson.

‘This is my wife!’ cried Jack, suddenly regaining his voice as he realised that the terrible moment had passed and MacPherson could not remember Nell. ‘My wife—Mrs Williamson.’

‘I shall not stay,’ interrupted Nell; ‘the ponies are too restless;’ and with a hurried bow to MacPherson she hastened away, before Jack had a chance to introduce him by name.

Both men quickly recovered themselves as

Mrs Williamson drove off. Jack resumed his former manner, and, under the pretext of giving MacPherson another cheque, detained him until Nell was well out of the way, whilst the expert, on his part, offered a clumsy apology for having presumed to mistake Jack's wife for a former acquaintance, as he bade his patron good-bye.

When he had gone, Jack hurriedly left the office, but his steps turned not in the direction of the Exchange for that morning. He sought his wife, whom he wisely elected to keep beside him until MacPherson had left the Camp for Pretoria, whence he was to start that same night by bullock-waggon for Mashonaland.

That night Jack told Nell who and what the man was that she had met in his office. Nell heard the story with breathless interest, then she sobbed out her relief and joy on Jack's breast.

'Don't cry, little woman,' said Jack, huskily. 'We are off the ragged edge—forever—thank God!'

BOB MACDONALD'S 'FIND'

A LITTLE woman stood behind the bar of one of the pioneer hotels of the Golden City. She was pale and slight, and might be termed pretty, despite the fact that her hair was a dingy red, her mouth broad, and nose a trifle short, but her smile was as honest and bright as the sunbeams gilding the garishly-decorated walls and mirrors of the long room, with its capacious counter and generously-stocked shelves.

The little woman rubbed away vigorously on the tumbler in her hand until it shone to her satisfaction; then she put it aside, and, picking up another unwashed one, dipped it in the trough of water beneath the bar, subjecting the dripping glass to the same

careful treatment of muscle and towel until it shone bright and clear as its fellow-glasses adorning the buffet behind her.

A group of men lounged at one end of the bar, chatting and laughing over their whisky and soda. One of the men, a short, heavily-built fellow, with rugged face, yellow beard and a good-natured twinkle in his small, deep-set, grey eyes, was relating snatches of his mining experiences. The men listened with evident interest, and laughed loudly at the sallies of wit from one who was known as the first mining expert of the Rand.

'I tell ye,' he was saying, in a voice reduced to chronic hoarseness through the risks and exposures of his calling; 'I tell ye there's gold in every stick o' ground in Mashona. Me and me partner, Ted Noonan, knew it years ago, when we trekked from Bechuana-land. But for that black divel of a king, Maghoonda, we might ha' struck a big reef then, but the blackguard drove us off, and we wid as fine a mining rig as anyone could show in those days.'

'Have another whisky and soda, Jim!'

exclaimed one of the group, as a laugh went up at the woebegone expression of the expert's face.

'I will,' swallowing the whisky and soda in a gulp as easily as he would a draught of spring water; 'and I've a bit o' that self-same quartz as I picked up in Mashonaland in my pocket to this day. Here it is,' producing a fragment of red quartz, half the size of his hand, and bristling with dashes of dully gleaming gold. 'There's a pound o' gold in that vein, if there's an ounce!' he exclaimed, as the men eagerly inspected the specimen.

Meanwhile, the little woman behind the bar continued her work of washing the dirty tumblers of the previous night, taking no heed of the group of men and their talk. She had placed a couple of syphons and a bottle of whisky before them at their bidding when they entered, received payment with averted eyes, and straightway busied herself in her work. The men, finding her unsociably in

clined, took no further notice of her. Once or twice she sighed deeply, and let her gaze roam through the open window, across the broad, unpaved street, to the row of low, white-painted shops, with their display of gaudy Kaffir blankets adorning the opposite corner. The morning sun reflected with dazzling radiance the gold-embroidered vests and snowy garments of the Moslem shopkeepers, squatting on the steps of the wide verandah. A tiny Kaffir boy crouched in the red dust of the road before his charges—a pair of splendid bullocks, their monstrous black horns measuring fully three yards from tip to tip—while their driver, a big Boer, and owner of the heavy waggon to which they were spanned, lazily discussed the price of a pair of blankets with the squatting Moslem men.

As she gazed, the little woman continued to rub the glasses mechanically; the bright sunshine seemed to burn her eyes. Gradually the scene, with its picturesque blending of sapphire sky and glittering roof-tops, white-robed Moslem men, dark-browed Boer, naked

Kaffir boy, and shining, black-hided bullocks, melted away before her staring eyes, and in its place she beheld a little one-chambered shanty perched on the veld in the shadow of a low kopje ; not a tree or bush near, not even a bit of waving grass to relieve the cheerless site ; no shelter from the fierce African sun for the two bonnie wee ones, save that of the mud hut. She could see them playing with their only companion, a sturdy native boy, in and around the crannies of the kopje, where the great green lizards and jewelled-eyed toads shared their sports ; her bairns, left to the care of the faithful black boy through the long hot day, until the night brought the poor foot-sore dad back to rest after his weary work of prospecting ; her bonnie bairns, whose sweet faces she had not seen for four long weeks. If her mother's heart ached with the pain of separation, the thought that her sacrifice provided the wherewithal to support her little ones and lighten the burden of the poor dad was, at times, some consolation.

Alas ! there was no consolation this glorious

morning, full of blinding sunshine, in the thought that she had done all in her power, like a devoted, brave little woman, to help her husband over the hard times and bitter disappointments that had fallen to his lot since his presence in the goldfields. No doubt, the little woman was worn out from her duties of the previous night, which had been a night of heavy drinking bouts after the day of excitement, for shares had taken a sudden leap from shillings to pounds, a big mine had been floated, and the share market was booming. Woman was still scarce in those early days of the Golden City; her services as barmaid were in great demand, chiefly for the reason that the presence of a woman behind the bar held the men in check. There was no fighting, no profanity, and less hard drinking where she presided, and the shrewd proprietors of canteen and hotel soon found their business thrive better. But the demand very soon exceeded the supply, consequently our little woman found a berth, despite her plain face and modest air, very

speedily when she made up her mind to conquer her scruples, for she hated the taste and sight of liquor, and enrol herself in the small but popular band of Johannesburg barmaids.

'And is it not for the bairns and you, Bob, dearie, that I am disgracing myself? Sure, that can be no disgrace, to help you, the best husband in the world, till bad times overtook you. Let me go,' she sobbed; 'no one'll ever know it in the old country, and you'll be able to save a bit of money to buy a mine some day. Let me go!'

Thus concealing her own despair and swallowing the bitter pill of lost pride, and, to her simple mind, honesty, the poor little soul went bravely to her post, serving her rough but kindly customers with flaming cheeks and averted eyes. That was six months before, to her it seemed six years. Sore, weary months, with only a sight now and then of the treasures in the mud hut beside the kopje. Lately her work had become a severer tax, for times were growing better day by day, strangers constantly arriving, the diggers drinking harder as prosperity grew a certainty,

and now she had to be at her post far into the night as well as all day. Only that week the proprietor had received a cargo of champagne, she looked on in despair as the cases were unloaded from the bullock waggon by the grinning Kaffirs. How she hated the golden wine, as she thought it was her hands that would have to uncork every one of those bottles snugly ensconced in their straw wrappings.

Still mechanically dipping the glasses in and out of the water trough, rubbing and polishing them, while these thoughts passed through her brain, she forgot her surroundings in feasting her eyes on that vision of those far-away dear ones, till a veil of tears blurred all before her. Suddenly the mist was swept away as the figure of a man appeared around the corner of the gleaming white shops opposite. .. He was tall and slender, with loosely hanging garments, his face wan and emaciated, the battered digger's hat was drawn down closely over his eyes, while his gait, as he crossed the road, smote the heart of the woman watching him, at every step. It was a step so slow and dragging, so eloquent of

hopeless efforts and utter abandonment to the workings of Fate.

The group of men at the end of the bar near the door were deep in a discussion over the specimen of quartz; only the mining expert raised his eyes as the man entered, and continued to glance furtively in his direction every now and then. The little woman pursued her washing and rubbing of the glasses, apparently unconscious of the presence of the new-comer; for a minute or more he stood motionless at the other side of the counter; all the while the little woman studiously kept her back turned as she rearranged the tumblers on their shelf, the small brown hands trembling visibly. Finally the man called in a whisper,—

‘Kitty.’

The little woman faced about abruptly.

‘What is it to be?’ she said, in a voice loud enough to reach the ears of the group of men. The tone was harsh and commonplace, but the blue eyes were full of tenderness.

‘A whisky neat,’ answered the man in the same loud tone.

The group of men continued their excited talk, a seedy digger was a sight too common to arouse any interest. When a glance assured the little woman that they were unconscious of everything but the nugget of quartz, she made a pretence to fill the tumbler from the bottle in her hand.

'Bob, Bob, dear,' she whispered in a pleading voice, 'don't ask me for a drink.'

'For the love of God, just give me a mouthful. Do, Kitty, do!'

'How have you left the bairns?' she hastened to inquire, in order to evade his request.

'Well and happy. Dick looks after them. Oh, they thrive like Kaffirs on nothing to wear,' he exclaimed, with unconcealed bitterness.

The irony of his speech hurt her to the quick; for a moment her heart hardened against him, then softened again as she looked in his wan face and glittering eyes. There was a light in them she had never seen there before.

'Bob,' she began, very gently, 'go ho—, go to the shanty. I'll throw up work here. I must

take care of you—you are ill. We won't try to save any more. Go now ; that's a dear.'

'No, Kitty, I'll not budge one step until you give me a good dram of that whisky !' exclaimed Bob excitedly. 'I want strength to make this tramp before me. I am going to foot it for twenty-four hours this time, and if I don't strike luck—well, that'll be the last of Bob Macdonald. So here goes, Kitty.'

With these words he seized the bottle of whisky, but the little woman, her face blanched with anger, tightened her grip on the bottle.

'Don't be a fool, Kitty,' he gasped. 'My veins are on fire and my heart is like ice ; it will brace me up. Leave go, Kitty.'

'I'll not,' panted the little woman. 'Has it come to this, Robert Macdonald, that you'll add drink to all our misfortunes?'

Thereupon ensued a sharp but silent struggle for the bottle. The man tugged at it with desperation, but the little woman's hold was like a grasp of steel, her blue eyes fairly blazed. The great brown eyes of her husband seemed starting from their hollow sockets. All

at once her hold relaxed. Something in the piteous stare suddenly unnerved her. She fell back against the buffet behind her, while the man hurriedly poured out a tumblerful of the whisky.

'Don't blame me, Kitty,' he muttered, as he filled the glass again, but this time weakening the whisky from a syphon near at hand. 'I feel better now. I'll be back to-morrow. God bless you, Kitty.'

The next moment he was crossing the road. Turning to give one short look behind him, he disappeared round the corner of the Moslem shops opposite. With a cry of despair, Kitty saw him disappear. The sound brought the men hurrying to her side.

'Oh, save him,' she sobbed; 'he's mad—bring him back!'

The men were thoroughly at a loss to understand what they considered her raving. One rushed away to find the proprietor, another to bring a doctor, while still another opened a bottle of champagne and held the brimming glass to her lips.

'Poor little woman; it's the fever. She is overworked!' and various other expressions of sympathy came from the group around her.

'Yes,' said the old mining expert, as he led the little woman out of the bar; 'no doubt it's the fever. I'll take her home to my missus. She'll get her all right soon.'

To the sobbing woman leaning on his arm he whispered,—

'Don't take on so hard, Mrs Mac. I'll go after Bob and bring him back. So cheer up, that's a dear.'

He had been an attentive observer of the whole scene; in fact, he had adroitly guided the attention of the men away from the little woman when their voices were pitched too high with excitement.

An hour after found Kitty thoroughly recovered and at her post behind the bar, and the good-hearted mining expert well out of Camp in pursuit of her husband.

In the meantime, Bob Macdonald sped straight away from the corner hiding him from the eyes of his distracted wife, across

a large tract of open space, which now forms the famous Market Square of Johannesburg. He passed through the yelling crowd of street brokers gathered round the Exchange building, a primitive structure of galvanised iron and wood, taking no notice of the unusual roar of excitement within. On through the wide street, with its iron shanties and canvas houses lining either side, now known as Commissioner Street, the main business thoroughfare of the city, until the end brought him to a well-defined road adorned by a canvas hut here and there leading to what is known as the 'Main Reef.' Climbing in and out of the dry bed and steep sides of a deep sluit, he found himself fairly on the reef. For months this immense stretch of flat, treeless, rocky veld had been the goal of his wanderings, the vision of his dreams. Here slept, deep in the red soil, the gold for which men, the world over, toiled and fought. How easy to dive down beneath the rugged surface in quest of the glittering treasure, if he had but the right to the land! Again he

smote his hands together, as he had done a hundred times before, in despair at his lack of money to buy, or luck to find a claim. Suddenly he stopped in his frantic walk; a gleam of quartz had caught his eyes. Dropping on his knees, he seized the bit of rock, and with a hammer he carried constantly with him, began to chip off bits of the stone. These he fell to carefully examining, only to relinquish with a sigh, then up again and off on his hurried tramp. Soon another gleam arrested his course; again he dropped on his knees, or squatted on the veld; out came the hammer, but this time the result was the same, and thus, alas! a score of times was the eager pantomime repeated, always to end in disappointment. His steps grew slower; the false strength of the whisky had begun to ebb away, hours had passed since he had left the Camp, the sun blazed fiercely as it neared the end of its western course.

Slowly it began to dawn upon him that he had been wasting time over ground he had

worked before. Weak and sore he threw himself beside a stunted growth of karoo grass, and gave way to a terrible paroxysm of despair; gnashing his teeth with fury, the poor fellow gave vent to curses loud and deep on his ill luck. Then he buried his head in the dusty bush, and abandoned himself to a passion of hysterical weeping.

Could Kitty have seen that sad spectacle from her weary post behind the counter in the hot, dusty bar, her heart might have melted with a pity that would have forgiven all the sins in the decalogue.

But those tears were not without their blessing. They relieved his over-strung nerves and cleared his brain, and, as he lay on his back, exhausted but composed, the friendly shelter of the little bush screening his eyes from the lurid glare of the fast-setting sun, he thought the situation over more calmly than he had done for weeks and months before.

'Yes, Kitty is right,' he said aloud. 'I have been chasing a will-o'-the-wisp.'

Then he fell to musing over the past, while the sun sank lower and lower in a blazing sea of fiery cloud-waves, until it dropped below the level of the karoo bush, casting its shadow in fantastic length across the veld, and was gone. Then all grew suddenly dark and still. Soon out of the blackness shone luminous and fair the face of Kitty, as he had beheld it smiling on him that happy day, their wedding day.

'Poor, dear, faithful Kitty,' he murmured, like one in a dream. 'Forgive me; I meant it all for the best; I did indeed. I was mad to make you a lady with the gold I hope to find in this cursed land.'

But Kitty's face seemed to shine more brightly, and now beside it shone the laughing faces of the two little ones. Like pearls their pretty faces gleamed in the darkness.

'My bonnie bairns!' he whispered, stretching out his hands to the sweet, glowing vision. Then he strove to rise, but the dew seemed to have stiffened his tired limbs, and, closing his eyes, he sank with his head buried in the damp leaves of the bush. Soon he opened his eyes

again, seeking for those dear faces, but they were gone, and in their places shone the evening star, attended by two glittering sisters, and then he knew that it was only a dream. The pitying stars had deceived him. Slowly an irresistible drowsiness crept over him; he tried to keep awake, counting those wonderful stars, but the stars whirled and danced before his gaze, or seemed to merge into one gigantic star, with a myriad glittering points. The star descended until its bright light dazzled his eyes. Nearer, still nearer, it approached. Soon he felt its shining body pressing him to the veld. It sank on his breast with an indescribable weight, pressing closer and closer, until it seemed to freeze the life-blood in his veins with its icy touch, crushing him into a state of deadly unconsciousness.

A few hours after life flowed back again, and he awoke; very feebly the great brown eyes opened. The moon bathed the wide plain of veld and its far-away fringe of kopjes with a golden mellow beauty. The soft rays filled him with a delicious glow. He felt strangely calm

and well again. It seemed that he had passed through a deep valley, dark and cold, and full of forgotten dangers. Now his body felt as light as air. He was indescribably happy. Suddenly he thought of Kitty. Where was she? He stretched forth his hand. The hand came into rude contact with some hard substance. Closing his fingers over it, he held the object up in the moonlight.

Then a wild cry of joy rang out on the lonely night, for there in his hand, gleaming richly in the mellow moon rays, lay a great nugget of gold-streaked quartz.

'Gold—gold—gold!' he shrieked again and again. 'Oh, thank God! Gold for Kitty and the bairns. Thank God!'

He covered the bit of senseless stone with kisses, weeping in his delirious joy. Then he set to work frantically to gather the bits of quartz lying about, tearing up the dry veld grass in his search, and concealing the collection in the karoo bush. The moon, now hanging low over the western edge of the great plain, beamed smilingly upon his labours. The

golden light began to pale before that other light, creeping like a shaft of silver up the bank of black clouds along the eastern horizon. Just as the moon sank, like a weary beauty, out of sight on her western couch, the man dropped exhausted beside the bush. The silver shaft in the east broadened and lengthened till it spread over all the heavens, shedding a dim, mysterious brightness far and near. The upturned face of the man caught the glow. He raised his eyes. They shone like opals as that wonderful light, deepened into rose and amber before the advent of the god of day.

'Thank God! the morning breaks,' he murmured. 'I'll rest a bit, and then I'll go to Kitty and the bairns.'

Pressing the hand in which he held a fragment of quartz to his heart, he shuddered once or twice, and then, with a long, deep-drawn sigh, fell asleep.

An hour after sunrise, Jim, the old mining expert, accompanied by a couple of friends, was riding at a brisk pace along the Natal road. They had left the 'Camp' (Johannesburg) and

the few mines on the reef far behind them. Jim's eyes had lost their twinkle as he scanned with anxious gaze the open veld on each side of the road. Several times the party had turned from their course to examine the ground around the low kopjes scattered here and there. Not a bush was overlooked, not a sluit passed without a careful search for the object of their journey—Bob Macdonald.

'It's a bad job, boys, that it is,' said Jim, disconsolately. 'I fear we'll never find the poor lad, and that little woman crying her eyes out till we get back.'

'He's lying somewhere mad with the fever, and can't hear us,' said one of the men.

'Too blind to see us, I bet,' put in the other.

'I shouldn't wonder—' began Jim; but he did not finish the sentence. Reining in his horse abruptly, he stood motionless, watching some object on the distant horizon. The men drew up beside him, waiting breathlessly to hear him speak. Suddenly he exclaimed,—'My God, the asvogels!' (vultures). 'Follow me, boys, as if the divel himself was at yer heels'

The next instant he was tearing madly in the direction of the great birds circling high in the heavens. Nearer and nearer they swept. Faster and more furious rode the men in the wake of Jim, whose keen eye watched the course of the asvogels, until the race between bird and beast seemed to hang upon a thread. Now the racers of the air wavered in their speed—their circling flight grew less and less—slowly and majestically they sailed straight down from the zenith of the heavens; already the panting riders could hear their shrill cries as they neared their prey, lying somewhere out of sight of those gallant pursuers. Lower and lower the odious birds hovered. Then, with one long scoop and shriek, they settled on the veld.

Quick as thought, Jim pulled out his revolver and sent a ringing shot in the direction of the asvogels; but the only result of the volley of shots was to send the horses plunging on more madly than ever. On he and his companions tore, sending the veld in showers under the hoofs of the excited animals. The time seemed

like an eternity to the men, when suddenly they came upon the flock of vultures perched on an object beside a group of karoo bushes. The startled birds arose with loud screams. Jim sprang from his horse, and the next moment was on his knees beside the lifeless form of Bob Macdonald. The destroying asvogels had not had time to begin their dreadful work. 'It was a close race,' said Jim, when relating that thrilling chase afterwards.

Bob lay on his side with a smile on his face like a sleeping child. So peaceful he looked, that for an instant Jim was at a loss to believe the poor fellow was dead. Thrusting his hand in the folds of Bob's shirt in the hope that some fluttering spark of life beat there still, he touched something hard and cold. He drew it forth. It glinted in the sunshine.

'Boys!' he whispered, overcome with emotion. 'It's gold—poor lad,' tenderly lifting the dead man in his arms, 'he's found the reef at last he looked for many a day—too late!'

That night the 'Camp' rang with the sad,

romantic story of Bob Macdonald's 'find.' The bar over which Kitty had presided was crowded with an eager, thirsty throng, and many were the regrets that the little woman who had served them so well and modestly would perform her duties no longer.

'And so,' said a dissipated young broker, 'she was a married woman after all.'

'I always suspected it,' remarked another; 'she was so deuced shy.'

'By Jove! what a find!' exclaimed a good-looking 'Jew boy.'

'Yes; right you are. There'll be a rush for the Black Reef now.'

'I say,' exclaimed a new-comer, 'he was here yesterday morning when you was showing that bit of Mashona quartz. I believe they had a tiff before he went away. I saw him come in, but forgot all about him while Jim was chinning about Maghoonda, until she began carrying on. Well, poor devil, he had the fever, and would have gone off anyhow, so it's a good thing he got in such a stroke of luck before he panned out.'

'Right you are!' exclaimed the hoarse voice of Jim at the speaker's elbow. 'Just open a couple bottles of fizz, Miss Thompson'—this to the new barmaid.

'I'm dead beat, boys ; here's to you !' swallowing a huge draught of the sparkling wine. 'Pass the bottle round, if you please, Miss Thompson, and take a glass yourself. I'm worn out. This has been the hardest day's work I've had for years. I've pegged out all the claim, bought the licences—twenty stands.' Here Jim poured out and drank another glass. 'Buried poor Bob, and left his widow over in the shanty on the other side of the 'Camp,' the richest woman in the whole of South Africa to-night, who, only last night was glad enough to serve whisky and soda to such blackguards as you and me, boys, to support the poor lad that I buried this morning. Well, such is life—here to-day and away to-morrow ; poor this year and rich the next. Open another bottle of fizz, if you please, Miss Thompson. Such is life !'

A SCALAWAG JOURNALIST

‘JOURNALISTS, like poets, are born, not made. You can no more put the brains into a man’s head, that will enable him to write a good leader, well constructed, well balanced, with a logical climax, than you can put the yolk into an egg to produce a rattling good hen or first-class crower. I know a man in London who undertook to turn out ready-made journalists for about one or two hundred pounds a head, all warranted to make prime editors—ha! ha! ha! You can’t teach a man experience; he has got to find that out for himself. Scribbling headlines isn’t journalism; dishing up succulent stews of scandal, concocting savoury morsels of gossip is not journalism. No, my boy, it’s

not journalism by a long way. And my friend in London, who tried his hand at setting up a Fleet Street baby-journalist farming establishment, soon found out his mistake with a vengeance. There's a score or more of fledglings from his literary incubator looking for his scalp to this day.'

Ferguson flicked the dust from his corduroys with his riding stub during the delivery of this speech to a trio of lean, hungry looking reporters, seated in various stages of undress at a long, narrow deal table, littered with editorial paraphernalia—inkbottles, paste pots, scissors and pens, newspaper cuttings, and stacks of unused writing-paper, interspersed with empty soda-water, brandy and whisky bottles, in fact, bottles of all sizes and shapes, in every stage of fulness, from a quarter to three-quarters, adorned the unwashed, unpainted table at which was manufactured the news matter dished up for the Johannesburg public who cared to expend a penny in the purchase of *The News*.

Macnamara, Green and Radey constituted a

willing and able triumvirate to do the service of their chief, who had picked them out of the gutter, so to speak, when down on their luck, clothed them, fed them and installed them in rough but comfortable quarters in one of the numerous canteens flourishing on the outskirts of the Camp. It was a matter of no importance to the chief that Mac was a jockey warned off the turf some months previous, Green an absconding accountant, and Radey an Australian ne'er-do-well. They suited his purpose better for all that. Proud of their elevation to the dignity of 'ink-slingers,' they worked faithfully for Ferguson, scoured the Camp for tit-bits of scandal, skirmished with a zeal worthy of a better chief for news items, and even worked the 'plant' themselves. Their esteem for their boasting, bullying, dissipated chief stopped barely short of reverence, for they felt keenly—poor devils—the intellectual superiority of the man. They realised how much culture, training and education had done for the chief, who never lost his skill in directing their labours; even when long-continued drinking paralysed his

hand and the pen fell from his shaking fingers, he was still master of his craft, and did not the daily sale of the little paper prove that, drunk or sober, this man was their master? Ferguson knew it as well, and better, treating them with a lordly scorn and contemptuous condescension that would have been laughable had it not been so pathetic. Many a time when he came home reeling into the shanty, which served as office, editorial department, printing department and publishing house all rolled into one, delirious with drink, ready to fight the whole staff and demolish all within his reach, the trio would vanquish him gently but firmly, nurse him back to his senses, and then sit down to patiently hear his abuse, and docilely work at his dictation around the long plank table. Let those who believe in the utter hopelessness of redeeming the criminal look upon a few such scenes, common enough in those early days of the Rand, and then doubt the power of knowledge, even in the guise of a drunken scholar, if they can.

It was the custom of Ferguson to hold forth

on one, topic or another before he began the labours of the day. This morning he was feeling sorer than usual over a rating he had received in the columns of a contemporary—one of the few reputable papers of the Transvaal—which made an effort now and then to keep this scalawag journalist in order.

Still smarting under this well-merited lashing, as he entered the shanty, he perched on one end of the table, dangling his legs, rapping the board or tapping his great riding boots with his whip as he launched into the foregoing tirade.

‘Yes,’ he commented, with a bitterness which forced him into truthfulness, ‘I was saying just now, journalists are born, not made. If that fellow Tompkinks thinks he’s one, he’ll wake up some fine morning and find out his mistake. Before I’d be the creature of a mining syndicate, the mouthpiece of as rotten a Government as ever blistered the side of God’s green earth, I’d throw every inkbottle, every pen, every scrap of paper on this table to the four winds, and let this blessed Republic of South Africa take care

of itself; but I'll fight the good fight for reform, that I will,' striking the table a blow that sent the red dust flying and the bottles dancing merrily; 'and no bullying, snarling, sneering, make-believe of a writer is going to intimidate me, either. I'll tell that doddering old idiot Om Paul the Truth. By heavens! I will, and he won't shut down this establishment, or carry off this plant, except over my dead body. And now to business. Boys,' he said, with a change of tone that would have startled a stranger, 'fill your glasses,' pushing a whisky bottle towards them with the end of the riding stub, 'fill your glasses and have a drink before we begin; it'll warm your blood and brighten your brains. Drink!'

'Well, Mac, what forage have you brought to the stable? Unload.'

'Only a murder or two,' answered Macnamara, pulling a dirty notebook from his trouser pocket and reading aloud. 'One at the brickfields—body of white man found in mud-kiln—head lopped off—found two Kaffirs sleeping in a waggon—nabbed them—took them to the lock-

up—charged them with murder—case on to-day.’

‘Good! Capital! me boy,’ cried Ferguson, delighted. ‘That, with rousing headlines, will make the paper sell like Robinson-Mine Shares to-morrow. But, Mac,’ here he put down the glass, with its untouched contents, on the table beside him, and peered under the brim of Mac’s dirty head-gear, ‘where did you get the body?’

‘I just borrowed a shovel and spade,’ answered Mac, with a leer, ‘and took a walk to the—you know—over there, on the hill.’

‘Well,’ exclaimed Ferguson, with a roar of astonishment, ‘by the Lord Harry, you are a genius! Why, it will be the making of the paper. Here, rattle this off now,’ he cried, dictating in pompous tones,—‘Bloodhounds of *The News*—The Eye of the Press never sleeps—Horrible Murder discovered by One of the Staff—The Mystery of the Brickfields. Ha! ha!’ ejaculated Ferguson; ‘it is just a little joke among ourselves; eh, boys?—a mystery of our own making. Now couldn’t we give Tompkinks a tip in news manu-

facturing, ha! ha! couldn't we, boys?' and here he paused for breath, nearly choked between his mirth and the whisky which had gone down the wrong way, while the staff, almost beside themselves with laughter, patted his back vigorously.

'There,' he cried, recovering, 'I'm all right; now rattle away, Mac:—Prompt Arrest of the Murderers—Shall the Cry of the Helpless Dead at last penetrate the Thick Skulls—I mean Walls—of the Volksraad?—Give us Guardians of the Night as well of the Day!—Where does the Money go that should build Roads and give us Water to drink?—Unlock the Treasury!—Spend some of the People's Money for the People's Safety! Just set that up at once in the biggest type in the plant, Mac, while I hear what Radey has to report.'

Ferguson rubbed his hands, and swung his legs under the table in high good humour as Macnamara proceeded to set up the type and work the plant. Pulling a short briarwood pipe from his pocket, which he filled from a jar of tobacco on the table, he set it alight, and began

to puff away, while he launched forth once more into a speech, the patient Radey, notes in hand, listening in open-mouthed admiration from his seat on an empty box, labelled 'Tinned Tomatoes.'

'That fellow Tompkinks thinks he's a journalist. He does, by the Lord Harry! He a journalist?—why, he's no more of a writer than, well—than one of you, me boys.' Here the boys laughed uproariously. 'Not as much—no—for he's not got a man of my ability and experience to teach him. Why, he began life in the Cape as a tailor's apprentice. That's a fact, by the Lord Harry! It's a fact. Nowadays, if a man can't make his living at a decent trade, can't measure calico on a counter, can't run a canteen or hotel, can't manage a theatre or pilot a leg show, he takes a pen in his hand and turns journalist, by the Lord Harry! Turns journalist! That's the style of fellow—Tompkinks and his kidney—that elbow men of my calibre out of the field. Oh, Lord!'

At this point the unhappy Ferguson was seized with a fit of sniffing meant for tears.

The staff were quite used to these sudden displays of grief, and promptly administered their usual remedy—a brimming glass of whisky and soda.

‘There, old man,’ said Macnamara, soothingly, ‘that’ll brace you up. We’ll knock Tompkins out this time, and no mistake. Just drink that up. We’ve a lot of copy on hand to-day,’ he added in an insinuating voice, anxious to push the work of his stroke of genius.

‘Right you are, Mac,’ exclaimed Ferguson, suddenly restored to a more cheerful spirit. ‘I’ll not look mournfully into the past; I’ll go forth to meet the future with a stiff upper lip—by the Lord Harry, I will. Now, fire away Radey.’

Macnamara returned to his task of making-up the galleys, while Radey proceeded to read from the notes before him, the chief replenishing his pipe and preparing to listen with great attention.

‘Awful midnight carousal in Fillis’ Circus last night—A lion and a leopard break loose.

Complete destruction of the whole cage of trained monkeys. Leopard gorges on the defenceless animals. Lion indulges in rare bill of fare—begins with box of snakes, follows up with elephant steaks, and eats the Kaffir keeper by way of dessert. Escape of boa constrictor, educated alligator and five tigers. Mangled remains of two barmaids, three waiters and one constable attached to circus bar found this morning. Horrible details.'

'Ha! ha! very good, Radey,' exclaimed Ferguson, gleefully 'that'll catch them. Just keep up the agony for a half column and then wind up as follows—write it out as I dictate,—“Harrowing as this description seems, it would be harrowing beyond the power of words to tell were it a reality, which, thank Heaven, it is not. But we feel it incumbent upon us to call the attention of the public to the culpable negligence of the management in the matter of properly securing the fierce and blood-thirsty beasts incarcerated in the rotten old shells made to do duty as cages, supplied with broken locks and rusty bars, and pre-

sided over by a caretaker in the person of a Kaffir boy, hardly big enough to make a respectable foreloucher. We humbly crave the indulgence of the public if in our zeal we have overstepped the bounds of veracity, and we beg to inform the public that we are a disinterested body acting for the public good alone, and that no dead-head tickets from the management have ever found their way to this office as yet.”

The rest of the staff listened with relish to their chief as he rolled out the sentences with great unction. The climax seemed to them quite to the point, and tickled them immensely.

‘Now for the next,’ cried Ferguson, throwing off his coat, and settling himself comfortably on the edge of the table, as if thoroughly warming to his work.

‘The gentleman—name unnecessary,’ began Radey, reading from a fresh batch of notes, ‘who escorted the wife of his friend to a concert at the “Wanderers” one evening recently — evening not specified — should after

this keep an eye upon who sits behind him. A word to the wise, etc., etc.'

'Capital,' cried Ferguson; 'who was the fellow?'

'Oh, nobody in particular,' said Radey, with a chuckle. 'There are plenty who will find the cap fits.'

'We are informed,' continued Radey, 'through secret and reliable sources, that the popular Cinderella dances—held recently in the most proper and select mansions of Dornfontein—will be discontinued. Anxious papas and too-managing mammas have found reason for alarm. *In vino veritas.*'

'You must elaborate that, Radey; it might get us into a libel case. Nothing like a good libel case to boom a paper. Go ahead.'

'Seven dog fights on 'Change yesterday. Business suspended twenty minutes during match between Barnie's bull-terrier "Flirt" and Sam's prize setter "Dan." Flirt came off victorious, but torn badly. Barnie adjourned to the Bodega, where he treated the panting beast to cakes and cream—happy canine!'

‘Bertie Swaggerer, the popular cricketer was “posted” on ‘Change yesterday. Hard times for Bertie !

‘Big booze, otherwise called smoking concert, on to-night at the Pioneer Hotel. All who are sober enough invited to sing.

‘Who was the “Johnnie” that presented the lovely Miss White, presiding over the drinking trough of the Grand Ranch Hotel, with a tumbler full of sovereigns the other evening? Echo answers Who?

‘Is this intimidation? General Joubert has had the walls of his particular office in the Government building at Pretoria frescoed with rampant lions and feasting asvogels to terrify the native visitors, so it is said.

‘The Government should be presented with a pair of eyeglasses to discover the truth of the facts(?) brought to light by the feeble rays of the *Comet* anent this journal, and its efforts for the good of the Rand.’

‘I don’t know about the lucidity of that last par, Radey,’ observed Ferguson, thoughtfully, while he peered through the cloud of smoke

surrounding his head. 'It's rather dim. However, I'll let it go; it will give Tompkins a bone to pick for five minutes or so!'

'Mother Chewing-Gum's soothing pills have arrived from New York,' continued Radey. 'This first-class American custom is heartily recommended to the Johannesburg belles. No thanks for advertisement. We don't chew.'

Here Radey paused, and looked up at his chief.

'Panned out, eh?' said Ferguson, blowing away the smoke from his eyes.

Radey nodded as he held up the notes for the other's inspection.

'Hum, spelling not so bad as usual,' he said, while making strokes with a pencil here and there on the dirty copy. 'There you are; go ahead and set it up!'

'Well, Green, I'm ready for you now! How have our numerous contributors shown up? Anyone earned the prize?'

'I think so, boss,' replied Green, with a grin, as he presented the chief with a long sheet of blue paper.

Ferguson took the bit of copy and scanned its contents for a moment. Then he burst into a loud laugh.

‘Well, this is a chestnut, by the Lord Harry!’ he cried, as he proceeded to read aloud the following:—

‘*Prize-Joke Competition.*—We are offering a prize of two guineas for the best original joke, made by a reader of our paper. Jokes, signed by *nom-de-plume* only, must reach us by Wednesday. The winner of this week’s prize is the contributor who signs himself “Non Compos Mentis.” We shall gladly forward “Non Compos Mentis” a cheque for the amount of two guineas, if he will send stamped envelope bearing his real name and address. Here is the brilliant joke which has floored all competitors:—

“A lady, recounting her experiences during her recent travels in South Africa, said that among many strange customs and queer things that surprised her, nothing so passed her comprehension as the universal habit of calling all sorts of dogs by the common name of “Voot-sack!”

‘You’ve earned those two guineas, Green, if you ever get them, me boy,’ said Ferguson, with a leer, as he returned the paper to him. ‘Take a drink instead, and then set that bright effusion up.’

The dingy, dusty chamber was resounding with the hubbub of the plant at work, the men engrossed in their labour of setting up copy, when a man entered, swinging the door behind him with a bang. He advanced with a swagger to the table and deposited a paper parcel beside the chief.

‘There you are!’ exclaimed the new-comer, with a sigh of relief; ‘that job is done!’

‘Hallo, Steins!’ said Ferguson. ‘Glad to see you so punctual. Take a seat.’

Steins obeyed, while Ferguson opened the parcel and examined the contents. These consisted of several ‘cuts’ roughly executed on wood blocks, but not lacking in a certain style of artistic skill. They were caricatures of men and women prominent in the political and art world of the Transvaal. Ferguson regarded them with a critical eye, chuckling

with satisfaction over the hideous distortions of some of the faces, and the vulgar application of others.

‘Capital, my boy!’ he exclaimed, rubbing his hands with satisfaction. ‘Capital! just the thing to set them all by the ears. Capital.’

The artist watched him with a curious expression on his pale face. There was a half sneer in his smile as he said carelessly,—

‘I’m glad they suit you, Ferguson. Have you got any tin?’

‘By the Lord Harry,’ cried the other, earnestly, ‘I haven’t a shilling to spare this morning. Just drop in to - night at the chambers, seven sharp, and I’ll have the cash ready for you.’

‘Sorry I can’t oblige you, Ferguson, for I must have the cash this morning.’

‘Oh, it will be all right to-night. I won’t fail to settle this evening. It will be all right, I say.’

‘I can’t wait, Ferguson,’ answered the other firmly. ‘I need the money this morning.’

‘Come now,’ began Ferguson, persuasively;

‘don’t be hard on a fellow ; just wait until to-night. I’m devilishly hard up just now.’

‘So am I,’ said the artist, rising and gathering up the blocks. ‘I’d rather burn the lot than give them to you. It’s very dirty work. I’ve done it for you long enough on little or no pay. I’ll try reputable work after this, and see if that pays better. Good morning, boys ; good morning, Ferguson ; sorry I can’t oblige you. Good morning.’

Arranging the parcel, he put it under his arm and strode out of the place with the same easy swagger, before the discomfited Ferguson could summon his wits in time to prevent his departure.

‘Boss,’ said Macnamara, who had been an uneasy witness of this scene ; ‘boss, I don’t like to see that fellow carry on so stiff. There’s something in the wind.’

‘Something in the wind, be hanged !’ cried Ferguson, in a rage ; ‘go on with your work, and none of your palaver.’

But Macnamara was right. There was something in the wind—a something that destiny

always sends, sooner or later, to punish those who degrade their gifts by perverted uses ; the something that cuts short the wrong-doer in his course ; the something that paralyses the tongue of the slanderer, and stays the pen of the maligner.

William Ferguson had abused every one of those heaven-born gifts showered upon him by a generous fate. Still in the prime of life, he stood there in the squalid, miserable den in which was printed his disreputable paper, a pitiful wreck, socially, mentally and bodily. A few in the Camp who knew his history spoke of his early career in Melbourne, when he was a brilliant writer and accomplished journalist, with the promise of a magnificent future before him. Many an old friend of those days, meeting him again in the Rand, held out the hand of encouragement and help, if only for the sake of his beautiful wife and little ones far away. But their kindness, one and all, was repaid by scurrilous attacks and insulting caricatures. In despair and sadness, more than in indignation, every friend dropped away until the wretched

man was left without a companion in decent society, and surrounded only by creatures of his own making. As he sank lower, his pen became more caustic ; his great gift as a writer turned to such evil account that people dreaded his censure like a pestilence. Contact with him was avoided as though he were a leper. Even the barmaids refused to serve him when he presented his leering face before the counter, while the servants of hotels and chambers disappeared when he wanted them. And all this degradation, all this failure, all this misery of his perverted life, all the mischief wrought by his evil pen, lay sleeping in the bottom of the festive glass. First wine, and then whisky. Drink, good servant, but deadly master, had opened the gates of ruin to this miserable man, pursued him with unrelenting steps, pushing him ever downward, until at last he sank to the level of a scavenger of the press, quartered in a shanty hovel, where that *something*, as Macnamara said, found him at last.

Perhaps he thought of all these things, his blighted career, his forsaken wife and little ones

as he filled his pipe, poured out another glass of whisky, and seated himself again on the edge of the plank table. But the chances are that he banished all such meditations with contempt. Evil had become a second nature with him. He revelled in the delight of dipping his pen in foul ink, and scattering its filth over friend and foe.

Swinging his legs under the table in his favourite attitude, puffing and drinking, he set to work, while the staff laboured at the plant, to concoct some scheme that would injure the artist Stein without getting himself into the power of the law, for this was the evil fellow's greatest anxiety. He loved his freedom dearly, and had been enabled, thanks to his clever pen and profound experience, to avoid those shoals before, so as to just escape by sailing very close to the law of criminal libel.

Smarting under the refusal of Stein, he forgot all things else but the desire to get even with the artist, and was lost in thought over the matter, when a hand was laid on his shoulder, and a voice roused him from his study, saying, in gruff tones,—

‘William Ferguson, you’re wanted.’

Ferguson sprang from the table, but the man held him in a tight grip, while the staff hurried to his side. A glance assured Macnamara of the state of affairs, and he quietly disappeared. Green and Radey followed his example in a twinkling, and Ferguson found himself, dazed and alone, with the burly Dutchman gripping his collar.

‘William Ferguson,’ said the man, ‘I arrest you, in the name of the Volksraad, for high treason.’

Pale and trembling, all his bravado fled, crying like the coward he really was, the wretched man submitted to be handcuffed without a word, and was led away to gaol. The something in the formidable form of the law had come at last, and so ended the career of one of Johannesburg’s most notorious and scurrilous, and his organ, *The News*.

A KAFFIR'S LOVE

FRANK HANNEY was off for Mashonaland. A goodly throng of well-wishers had assembled at the starting point, in Loveday Street, to bid him good-bye and good luck on his lonely trek to the region of the Chartered Company's domain. His voice was the cheeriest, his laugh the heartiest, and his spirits the gayest in all that crowd of friends, every man of which knew that 'Balls,' as they loved to call him in recognition of his many acts of generous help to more than one among them when in sore need of the ready, 'Balls' was sinking the last of his pile in the supreme effort to woo back the smiles of that fickle dame, Fortune, amid the untrodden wilds of the latest Eldorado—Mashonaland.

Although the talk was eager and excited, the speculations many, supported by shrewd arguments and hopeful surmises, and the admiration for Frank's outfit unbounded, yet, to one accustomed to the manners and words of the Johannesburg 'Johnnie' (a colloquialism for any description of enterprising young man), a spirit of sadness was plainly visible, a fact not in the least surprising, seeing that they were all about to lose the best-loved man in the Camp. One who had watched day and night by the fever-stricken couch of nearly every mother's son of them; whose hand was as gentle as a woman's, and voice as kind as a sister's; the door of whose big shanty, on the now forsaken mine, stood ever open, as wide as his purse-strings, to one and all of them; who bore, with good-natured complaisance, the greatest amount of 'jumping' (a South African term for indiscriminate borrowing) of any man in the Ranch.

They jumped his collars and socks, his gloves and shoebrushes; they jumped his books and papers, his soap and bootjack, his

whisky, his pipes, his straight-cut; they even jumped his sjambok now and then, thereby saving a refractory native mine-hand a well-deserved hiding. But now the reign of the jumper was over. Dear old 'Balls' was going away for good and all. No more merry junketing on the mine. No more jolly evenings at the Theatre Royal, when the *open sesame* of Frank's cheque-book secured a box view of the pretty chorus-singers in 'La Mascotte,' or some equally popular opera. No more cricket matches now, for what would those exciting games at the 'Wanderers' have been without the stimulus of Frank's cheery gaiety and Frank's pocket-book? Who would keep wicket so skilfully? And those mad, reckless four-in-hand drives to Pretoria! Ah, well! perhaps poor 'Balls' had been a little too careless with the 'ready,' too prodigal of his portion. But was he not loved? And, after all, the money cannot be ill spent, entirely thrown away, that draws around a man the heartstrings of his fellow-men!

There was not one in that crowd gathered

around the shining bullock-team and splendid waggon, and their, big, handsome owner, who would have hesitated an instant to sell his last shirt, give up his last shilling, nay, shed his blood, if need be, for 'dear old Balls.' But Frank did not need any proofs of thankful devotion, beyond a hearty hand-shake and blessing just yet. Mashonaland first; after that—well, the Fates would take care of the future, was the thought uppermost in his mind as the boys surged round him, brimming with regret and good wishes.

And Fate was providing for the future at that very moment in the shape of a stalwart Kaffir, his finely poised head and brown, naked shoulders towering above them as he made his way through the crowd.

'Baas Frank!' he exclaimed, breathlessly, 'Mena hamba wena' (I go with you).

'Hello!' he cried, turning in pleased surprise as the melodious accents of the Zulu tongue fell upon his ear.

'You here? Mooda, lungill umfana' (good boy) 'to come and see me off.'

‘No, Baas Frank,’ said the great Kaffir, relapsing into very good English, which he had dropped in his excitement. ‘I come to offer you my services. I want to go with you.’

‘Oh, you do. Very well, then,’ answered Frank, whose previous knowledge of the Kaffir’s good points and able driving rendered him at once satisfied with this abrupt arrangement. ‘Get aboard!’

Mooda joyfully mounted the driver’s post at the fore of the waggon, seized the bamboo whip-stick, fully fifteen feet long, from the unresisting hand of the Kaffir already in possession of that proud position, and waited calmly for the order of the Baas ‘ke jema’ (to run).

Undoubtedly the entire outfit, as it stood ready for Frank Hanney’s expedition, deserved the unstinted praise bestowed on it by his friends. To select and properly equip a waggon is a matter of the utmost importance to the man, be he prospector or explorer, setting out on those long and perilous ‘treks’ usual in South Africa. The first considera-

tion is the wheels, which should be of well-seasoned wood, and made with the tires in segments, after the fashion of the wheels of a field artillery gun, axles perfectly flawless, bolts in faultless working order. The tool-chest well stocked with gimlets, augers, shifting spanner, screwjacks, nails, screws, hammers and waggon grease. Being an experienced trekker, Frank's waggon was as perfect as possible in all these details, and a model in its way, with its canvas-covered tent, composed of broad, stout wooden bars; its neatly-lined inner surface of pale blue painted canvas; its comfortably arranged inside fixings, in the shape of commodious box seats, one on each side, of the length of the tent, both of which formed at the same time a couch and receptacle for wearing apparel, books, provisions and the necessary trading truck; its neat display of hanging pockets, in which were stored looking glasses, combs, brushes and other articles of the toilet, the ceiling of the hood serving as a miniature arsenal, where a fine collection of guns and revolvers were fastened

within easy reach, and yet out of dangerous proximity. Its numerous devices for comfort in the shape of a false floor, whereby easy motion and freedom from jolting was removed by the carriage springs between it and the floor of the waggon; its heavy canvas flaps at either end, fastening one well over the other, converting the tent into a cosy chamber by night or pleasant shelter by day. In fact, nothing was overlooked in the furnishing of this commodious waggon, even to the pots and baskets which might be seen together, with a swinging wooden hammock suspended underneath the waggon.

If the great waggon was perfect in its completeness, so also were the cattle and their outfit. A complete span of sixteen splendid bullocks, their black-and-white hides shining like satin in the sunlight, was harnessed, African fashion, to the waggon by rheims of untanned leather or ox hide. This mode of harnessing is quite simple. A strong yoke is laid across the bullock's neck, and a couple of wooden keys put through

the holes in the yoke on either side of the bullock's neck, a rheim or thong of hide, with a running noose, is then put over the horns of the animal. The heads of all the bullocks are then lashed together at a convenient distance; next a neck-strap is fastened to the keys under the throat of each bullock, by which means the yoke is brought to bear on the natural hump of the animal. The yokes are then linked together by a chain at an interval of about nine feet, and the great team, with its long stretch of bullocks, is ready to start at the ringing crack of the driver's monster whip, with its yards and yards of whirling thong, under the guidance of the tiny Kaffir forelouper, who leads the whole span by the rheim attached to the foremost brace of oxen.

'As pretty a turnout as ever left the Camp,' said one, who had been round the span a score of times taking stock of its good points.

A verdict fully endorsed by the crowd as the last good-bye was spoken, and the whole outfit moved briskly away, spurred on by the

vigorous music of Mooda's whip, while Frank, comfortably balanced in his canvas house on a three-legged camp-stool, pipe in hand, smiled benignly on the cheering crowd following at the waggon's wheels.

'Send us a line from Mafaking, Balls, dear boy!'

'I shall!' shouted Frank in reply.

'If you see Brown, of the mounted police, tell him he'll have plenty of company soon.'

Frank nodded and smiled, for by this time his voice was inaudible, as the waggon ground and oscillated in its rapid journey over the uneven roadway of Loveday Street. Mooda made capital use of his mighty whip as span and waggon crossed the great market square in a whirl of dust and ringing clatter, the shrill cries of the tiny foreclouper mingling not unmusically with the hubbub. The shopkeepers came to their doors to have a look at the first trekker to Mashonaland. The barmaids waved their dainty white aprons, and sighed a farewell as they forsook their thirsty customers to get a last view of 'good old Balls.'

Right proud was Mooda that his beloved 'Baas' should make so stunning a departure from the Camp, and right merrily he cracked and swung his great whip as they sped through Doornfontein, where a bevy of pretty belles, from villa portico and windows, shared in the farewell of the barmaids left behind, their hearts and handkerchiefs fluttering equally with the same regretful farewell. Still, the only sigh that escaped the object of all these affectionate farewells was not for the pretty barmaids or eligible belles—no, indeed—but for the lost delights of cricket as the waggon bore him past and away from the 'Wanderers' cricket grounds for the last time.

When the low hill overlooking Doornfontein and the Camp was gained, and the road to Pretoria lay well before them, the team settled into an even pace, Mooda relaxed the bravado of his whip, the little forelouper trudged soberly before his charges, and the two or three boys, who had accompanied his start for a longer and more intimate good-bye, turned their horses' heads and drove back

to Camp. Frank drew the canvas curtains, buttoned the flaps, and, throwing himself down on one of the box couches, prepared to enjoy a good sleep, the first in several days, with as easy a conscience as though he had just set out on a pleasure trip. In fact, a trip of that description would have been more of a bore than otherwise. His was one of those spirits that sleep lightest when danger and adventure are in the prospective, the unknown before the known vanishing in the vista of the past.

Meanwhile, Mooda watched over the slumbers of his master with loving solicitude, guiding the great waggon and its heavy team over the best places in the rut-filled road, while he smoked his pipe in silence, noiselessly flicking now and then the backs of the bullocks with the long stick of his whip, giving an occasional order in pantomime to the little forelouper or the other Kaffir servants, stretched out on the floor of the waggon beside him, and thus began the first day of that long trek to the wilderness in the new land of gold.

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'Kumulo izinkabie' (outspan the cattle), 'Mooda, and let us pitch here for the rest we need so badly.'

'Yebo' (yes), 'Baas, yebo,' answered the cheery voice of Mooda.

'Untela umlela, umfana, tch-tcha' (light the fires, boys, quickly), continued Mooda, as he rapidly and deftly outspanned the dust-stained, weary bullocks. The half-dozen naked Mashona obeyed his orders with alacrity, which proved the command was a welcome one, and in a trice a merry, crackling blaze was leaping up from the fire of twigs and dry cattle-droppings, carefully kindled in a hollow scooped in the earth, and protected by a couple of granite boulders brought from a kopje near by; a pot was soon balanced on the stones, and the licking flames set gaily to work to boil the water brought from the river close at hand. Next, a quarter of game, killed in the day's trek, was prepared for roasting. A goodly supply of mealies poured into the steaming pot, and one of the party set to stir the savoury mess until cooked. But not until Mooda had carefully

filled a stone kettle with some of the boiling water from the pot. Mooda was brewing tea. When he had made it to his satisfaction, strong and fragrant, he placed the kettle carefully on the ground, and drawing near the battered waggon, drew from the swinging wooden hammock or shelf hanging underneath a small basket-box. This he opened, taking out first a small tray, which he carefully dusted, next a large pewter bowl and platter, then a sugar basin, filled, strange to say, with fine, white sugar. These, together with a silver spoon, he arranged on the little tray—the pewter kettle, with its fragrant contents, occupying the centre. Then he approached the waggon, and gently lifting the frayed, weather-beaten curtains of the canvas-hooded tent, called softly,—

‘Baas, Baas Frank, here’s your tea.’

‘Thank you, Mooda,’ answered the voice of Frank Hanney, in tones which were weak indeed but had not lost their kindly ring. ‘Fasten back the flaps and come in.’

Mooda placed the tray on the floor of the hut while he obeyed Frank’s order. Then he

mounted the waggon, and placing himself on a stool beside the berth, on which was stretched out what was but a shadow of the splendid, vigorous form of the master in whose service he had enrolled himself so joyfully that very day just six months ago, proceeded to pour out the tea.

‘Ah, that’s good,’ said Frank, as he feebly grasped the bowl, and slowly swallowed its contents.

‘Mooda, you make the best tea I have ever tasted;’ this with a wan smile that went like a stab to the faithful Kaffir’s heart.

‘Is that so, Baas? Well, I am glad I can make something that does you good, Baas. Let me dress you now, and come out for a little walk, while the boys are roasting a wild fowl for your supper—it’s manandie’ (nice to taste), ‘Baas; it’s sure to make you strong. Come.’

Frank submitted like a child to be dressed by the brawny black hands, which lifted him to his feet as gently and firmly as the hands of a mother. The tea was strong and refreshing

and filled him with a slight approach of strength, while the fumes of the fowl, already roasting over the fire, awakened for the first time in many weeks the desire to eat.

‘I believe I have an appetite, Mooda,’ he said, with a return of the wan smile, as the Kaffir assisted him out of the waggon, and guided his dragging steps across the space between it and the blaze.

‘Yes, Baas,’ replied Mooda, encouragingly. ‘You’ll eat a good supper to-night, that you will.’

When the walk of five minutes was accomplished, a kaross of skins was spread near the fire, cushions brought from the waggon, and Frank comfortably propped up for the supper, which proved very good indeed. The tender flesh of the bird was sweet and juicy, and Mooda’s great, glowing eyes softened as he beheld his beloved master eat a goodly portion of it with evident relish. Then the pewter kettle was replenished, another bowl of the fragrant, strengthening tea partaken of with a biscuit, and Frank declared himself, to Mooda, unbounded delight, quite another man.

The Kaffir lit his pipe and stretched himself on the ground near the kaross. Frank let his eyes rove a few minutes over the scene of their encampment. It was a view of wonderful beauty and grandeur. But Frank's eyes were weak, his glance wavering. Small wonder that the great beauty of it was lost on him. Illness had made him weary of the unending panorama of mountains of granite, rivers of silver, and valleys of wondrous luxury of bloom and tree, constantly recurring in all those months of trekking in the wilderness.

'Come nearer, Mooda. Why do you sprawl on the ground? Is not the kaross good enough for your black hide?'

'Yebo, Baas,' answered Mooda, drawing nearer with a laugh.

'Give me your hand. Umfana, you've been like a brother to me—damme you are a brother—if you are a black man, for no brother could have loved me better or nursed me through this damned fever better than you have done. Umfana, I thank you from the bottom of my heart, Mooda.'

Frank seized the black hand in his own, so white and emaciated, and tried feebly to raise it to his lips, but the poor fellow's strength gave out before he could accomplish his generous impulse, and the hand rested gently on his breast, while the glow in Mooda's eyes grew dim in the firelight.

'I'll rest now,' said Frank presently, his eyes closing dreamily. Suddenly a dull roar echoed in the distance. 'Ha!' he exclaimed, opening his eyes and looking towards the river. 'The lions are out to-night, Mooda. Too bad, I cannot shoot the brutes. You keep them off, Mooda, while I have a sleep.'

'Yebo, Baas,' whispered Mooda, as Frank's eyes closed. 'I'll watch—now go to sleep. There,' covering him with the kaross, and adjusting the cushions under his head. 'Sleep; I'll watch, Baas.'

One of the Mashonas brought Mooda's supper and silently placed it before him. When he had finished eating he bade the native take away the dish, while he went to the waggon, and, securing a gun and revolver, returned to

the side of the sleeping man. On examination, he found the weapons properly loaded, and placed them within reach. Then he gave orders for fresh fires to be lighted. This was soon done, and a circle of blazing piles formed an effectual barrier against the encroachments of the lions, who were gathering on the opposite bank of the Lunda River.

It was a sorry-looking little encampment on which the rising moon looked down and the stars swept with their twinkling glances. Not one of that splendid span of bullocks which drew the great waggon on its eventful exit from Johannesburg remained ; alas ! poor beasts, their bones were scattered on river bank and plain, lost in sluit and bush along the perilous route. The glory of the great waggon had vanished ; its ponderous wheels were patched and broken, its canvas hood dust-stained, ragged and grey. One by one the Kaffirs had dropped off. The tiny foreloupier was swallowed up in a drift on the Tull River, another lost amid the granite recesses of a huge kopje, while still another made a

succulent meal one evening for a prowling leopard.

Mooda piled fresh bush on the fire near the kaross, and started more than once with his fingers on the trigger of his gun as the rumbling growl of a lion seemed to grow near, but as the growls melted away he laid the weapon down and continued his musing, while he feasted his eyes on the rich beauty of the scene at his feet. The camp was perched on a slight declivity. Behind loomed up grand and impressive the rugged front of a granite mountain. Below, the bed of a gorge, covered with thick bush, swept down to the smooth plain skirting the river bank. As Mooda's eyes rested on the waters, sleeping like a ribbon of silver in the moonlight, he saw here and there the ribbon break into shining ripples, and he knew the leopard and the lion were fording the lovely stream, attracted by the scent of the prey resting from the day's labour, on which they hoped to gorge and rout. He watched an antelope, slender and alert, its great horns gleaming in the moon-rays, approach the

river from the opposite shore. For a second the graceful animal posed motionless, and then bent its head to drink; a splash, a cry of pain, and then a bound, but too late, a huge lioness sprang up the bank and into the bush, a dainty supper for her babies between her strong teeth, as she sped to her lair under some neighbouring kopje.

Then Mooda grew tired of watching the scene, tired of the beauty of the wild lilies and orchids slumbering under their mantle of dew beneath the bush, and the scent of wild honey from a myriad of luscious hives down deep in the heart of the bush.

His eyes turned to that white, wan face, with its golden beard and dark-circled eyes, the face of Frank sleeping softly in the pale, silvery glow of the moon and stars, sleeping like a babe on his bed of karosses.

There is in the African nature a wonderful love of all that is beautiful, great, romantic and true. A well of mysteries fed from the fountain of century upon century of ancestors whose greatness flourished, drooped, perished

and was lost in that strange land, teeming with mystery and golden wealth. Mooda was a Zulu, fierce, brave and reckless, but impressionable as a child, and the first day he met the man sleeping beside him in the moonlight, the day he went boldly to the grey shanty on the mine and demanded in gruff, imperious tones employment, his great untamed spirit was quelled, conquered by the kindly light from those beautiful eyes, the music of the rich-toned voice. A strange, romantic love awoke within him at that meeting. To Frank it was nothing that one of the finest Kaffirs on the mine should be his devoted servant—all men loved him—but to the poor, proud savage, it was a treasure worth all the gold of Africa, the friendship and companionship of this man, whose beauty drew him to his feet, body and soul. Mooda was a mystic of the highest degree, the natural mystic. He believed that once, ages ago, this man, so splendid, so regal and so noble-hearted, had been his brother. He believed that they had lived and loved together somewhere in that past rolled up in the count-

less centuries gone before. To serve him, to save him; ay, to die for him—that was his, the black man's, mission. Had he not saved him, brought him almost within sight of his home and dreams, the golden land of Mashona?

And to-night big, burning tears stood for the first time in his life in Mooda's eyes—to-night had he not called him brother? taken his hand in his, with a caress of love and equality—called him brother? Oh! the joy of it was like pain; it thrilled his heart to suffocation. Throwing himself beside the sleeping face, he drew near to press his lips to the damp locks, shining yellow in the moonbeams. When there, glaring across the sleeping face, with baleful light, shone the fiery eyes of a black-faced lion.

Without a cry or a sound, Mooda sprang over the body of Frank straight at the throat of the terrible beast, burying his strong, white teeth in the skin. Surprised for a moment, the lion was taken aback; then he shook off the desperate Kaffir like a fly, and crushed him with a blow of his formidable paw. The

next moment he was making off with poor Mooda, bleeding and unconscious. All was the swift, silent work of a moment.

Frank turned again and again uneasily in his sleep. The moon's mellow rays seemed to scorch and burn into his very brain. His heart beat violently as though in the presence of some awful evil. Strange figures crowded around him, a palace of gold reared its stately glittering front before him, a long train of superbly caparisoned warrior horsemen surged from the gates of the palace. They were all black men ; one, surpassing in majesty of bearing all the others, approached him, and bidding him arise, threw over his shoulders a mantle of gold,—‘Wear this, it is thy inheritance.’

Then, placing a weapon of gold in his hand, the warrior exclaimed,—

‘Save thy brother !’

Frank raised his glittering weapon—just then his eyes fell on the bleeding face of Mooda, lying prone beneath the huge paws of an enraged lion. Quick as a thought he levelled the shining barrel at the head of the

beast. There was a flash, a loud report, and when the smoke cleared away, Frank awoke to find himself standing by the side of a lion, dead, with a bullet straight in his flaming eye, and Mooda crushed beneath the lifeless body.

The report of the gun brought the natives rushing to the side of the great beast. Very carefully they raised the carcass, while Frank bathed the poor battered face of his faithful friend and brother, until the fast-glazing eyes opened and looked into his with a world of love in their dying depths.

‘Baas—you here?’ whispered Mooda.

‘Yebo,’ said Frank, tenderly. ‘God bless you, Mooda,’ he cried, breaking down completely. ‘You have given your life to save me. Oh! God!’

Then he fell beside the dying Kaffir, weeping bitterly.

‘Baas,’ gasped Mooda, ‘call me—’

‘Brother,’ cried Frank.

A wonderful smile lit up the black face until its very wounds seemed beautiful. Then the light went out for ever.

Mooda's death roused Frank from the lethargy of fever which had overcome him, and in a few days, after burying the faithful fellow with his own hands, for in his grief those poor, mangled remains were too sacred for the touch of any other hand, he pressed on his lonely journey, but Mooda's spirit seemed to guide him, for in a few days he came, quite accidentally, on a portion of the British South African Mounted Police, and joined them in their march to Fort Salisbury.

On one of his wrists Frank wears to this day a battered woven copper armlet, a treasure more dear to him than the riches that have fallen to his lot, since it is all that remains to him of Mooda, the faithful servant, friend and brother.

MRS BENJAMIN'S DIAMOND NECKLACE

THE Royal Arcade Canteen was the most popular saloon in the diamond camp, and one of the oldest, for it had occupied the same site in the now historic days of the year 1867, when an Irish gentleman of adventurous spirit, named O'Reilly, travelling through the little Dutch Republic of Griqualand West, found himself one nightfall on the threshold of a Boer homestead. The Dutchman's hospitality was luckily craved and granted, for, among a lot of pretty stones on a table, which had attracted the traveller's curiosity, was discovered a twenty-one and a half carat diamond, worth fully five thousand pounds. The fortunate 'find' of O'Reilly at once drew the

attention of Europeans, and among the first canvas shanties erected was a very rickety one bearing in rudely-painted black lettering, the pretentious record, The Royal Arcade Canteen. A plank, torn from the bottom of a waggon, supported by a couple of barrels, did service as bar, while the ant-heap floor made a comfortable seat for any customer who cared to avail himself of it. Diggers were not over-fastidious in those early days, and no doubt enjoyed a game of nap or poker squatting on the primitive floor, made smooth and shining by frequent applications of ox-blood polish, as they do nowadays in the cool, luxurious retreat of the Kimberley Club.

When, in '69, the famous 'Star of South Africa,' the magnificent diamond now gracing the tiara of the Countess of Dudley, was found by a Griqua native, from whom it was purchased by a Boer with goods worth four hundred pounds sterling, and immediately sold by the Dutchman for ten thousand pounds sterling, a rush was made for those barren, wind-swept plains of Griqualand. Thousands of fortune-

seekers hied them to the fields, drawn by the magic fame of the 'Star.'

The Camp swarmed like a great human beehive, haggling and squabbling over claims for mining purposes. So great was the demand for land, that tiny plots of only a few feet in area were divided and sub-divided until every inch of the diamondiferous soil was bought up. Many of the new-comers, who had paid the required licence of ten shilings per month for their plots, disposed of them in a few weeks for a hundred and two hundred pounds sterling. And so rapidly did the value increase, in ten years' time these self-same lots attained a value of ten thousand to fifteen thousand pounds sterling each.

With this excess of prosperity, the Royal Arcade Canteen improved apace. It soon shed the chrysallis of shantydom, and bloomed into a flourishing hostelry in the shape of a glittering, brand-new, one-storied edifice of corrugated galvanised iron, sporting a spacious verandah, windows with window panes, doors with handles and locks, floors with plank coverings, in lieu of

the traditional ant-heap mud. And the same comely, smiling, florid-faced hostess, who had in those days ruled with firm but genial sway the rising fortunes of her husband's canteen, still presided at the time of this sketch over the establishment, grown, like her own fair self, into noble proportions as the years advanced.

She may have been fifty; she might have been but a day over forty, so lightly sat the years of widowhood on Mrs Benjamin's brown tresses and smooth cheeks, and the men were few and far between in the Camp who could have made a guess at the widow's age, so hazy was the recollection of the few old-timers of Mr Benjamin's exit, and the widow's accession to the sovereignty of the Royal Arcade Canteen. Still, she was a serene, richly-dressed fact, swaying backwards and forwards in her low rocking-chair, for that delightful Yankee invention is popular in all the British colonies, despite its being tabooed in merry England. The diamonds on her plump, white fingers and capacious, silken bodice, flashing and scintillating in the warm moonlight filtering through the trellised lattice

surrounding the verandah of her own private sitting-room, where a small party of special favourites were enjoying her hospitality this glorious midsummer New Year's Eve.

The yellow half-breed maid served bumpers of sparkling wine, while the men discoursed on seasonable topics. Mrs Benjamin's rosy lips were parted with a more complacent smile than usual, as she examined, with the keen glance of connoisseur, an uncut diamond lying in the palm of her chubby hand.

'It's a beauty, and no mistake,' she was saying, as she swung to and fro, her voice as soft and indolent as the noiseless, lazy sweep of the rocking-chair. 'I'm sure it is a fancy stone—it looks quite blue. You're very good to give me such a fine New Year's gift.'

'Oh, I was sure you would like it; but no thanks, Mrs Benjamin; just put it along with the rest on the chain, you know, and I'll feel highly honoured.'

Mrs Benjamin's eyes twinkled in the shadow from the rocker, but she said nothing. She had no objection to a little wooing; it helped to

pass the time, which would have otherwise hung heavily on her hands when she was not engrossed in her duties at the bar, looking after the kitchens, the maids, and the general comfort of her guests. The man took her silence as a tacit consent to his wishes. He was an old diamond broker, and a very respectable member of the market. He knew her weakness for diamonds—rare specimens in the rough. He had been looking for the stone shining dimly in her hand for two years, and as he watched her caressing the gem, he felt that the goal of his hopes was in sight, and the widow, her fine hotel and desirable bank account would soon be a joint company, with himself as general manager and director.

Mrs Benjamin seemed to divine her admirer's thoughts, and a desire to pique him, just for the fun of the thing, moved her to say, with an affectation of disappointment,—

‘Oh, my, Mr Smith, I really believe it's too small to match the others!’

‘No, indeed, my dear Mrs Ben!’ this so earnestly that he forgot he was using her name

rather affectionately. 'No, indeed ; it's just a splendid match.'

'Oh !' said the widow, softly, while she gave a little incredulous laugh.

The rest of the men winked knowingly at one another. They quite grasped Mr Smith's meaning. It had long been a standing joke among them that whoever found a diamond to match the widow's necklace, and thereby complete the ornament, would make a match of the widow as well.

'Come, Mrs Benjamin, give Smith a chance,' exclaimed one of the men. 'Let us see the stones and decide ; that's only fair, you know.'

Mrs Benjamin did not answer for a moment. She balanced the gem in her hand, as though weighing it. At the same time the motion of the rocker quickened a trifle. Smith bent his long body forward and looked beseechingly in her face. She had a very soft heart, and the glance fluttered her in spite of her assumed indifference. So she arose with a laugh, and led the way to the sitting-room.

'All right, we'll see,' she said, as she retreated

to an inner room. In a few moments she returned, bearing in her hand a small brass-bound leather casket. Placing it on a table, she invited the party to draw up their chairs, while the yellow maid adjusted the lamp and poured out another bottle of champagne. When the glasses had been refilled a couple of times, and all were on the *qui vive*, Mrs Benjamin unlocked the casket with a little golden key, secreted by a chain amid the ample folds adorning the bodice of her gown, and, lifting out a tray loaded with sparkling trinkets, proceeded to spread the contents out on the table for the edification of her visitors.

There were brooches of horseshoes, crescents, stars, and curious designs of every description ; rings, bangles, bracelets, ornaments for the hair, bonnet-pins, and many other ingenious devices in the paraphernalia of womanly vanity, all glittering and blazing with diamonds of the purest water.

‘Yes, I like to look at them now and then,’ said Mrs Benjamin, in reply to the admiring ejaculations of the men. ‘That’s about all the

good they are to me. I never wear them. What's the use? I'm not in society, you know.' This with a good-humoured laugh. 'But I like the beauties. Every stone of them is like a bit of poetry to me. I don't need to sell them—never. I have plenty to keep me.' Here a mischievous glance was levelled at the greedy face of her admirer, Mr Smith. 'But when I'm tired and sick of the bar, the men and the whole business, I just shut myself in here and rest my eyes looking at the pretty creatures. Everyone of 'em brings back an old friend—some dead and gone, others married and happy in the old country; a few, poor lads, working their time out on the breakwater for trying to make money too quick, trying to play the game of I.D.B., you know. Everyone of the sparklers came over my old man's bar. The boys was generous in them times, thought nothing of chucking a stone or two into the glass in payment for their drinks. That was before the Government took things in their own hands and made the diggers register their finds. Benjamin got certificates for the lot, and had 'em fixed up like this

when he used to go to London. Poor old dear ; that's many and many a day ago,' said Mrs Benjamin, passing her plump hand caressingly over the glittering display before her. 'How he loved to see me rig myself out in them, and take me to a dance. Didn't he enjoy making the others' mouths water? I should say so. But I locked them away when he died. I was afraid to go around alone, so I just told my customers that I had sold 'em. That I'll never do. They will go, every stone of them, when I die, to help Father Donnelly to build a school for the kids of those poor boys that drop off with fever over in the De Beers. That's just where they're going, and nowhere else,' said the widow, her voice hardening a bit, while her eyes rested with a glance that was almost a menace on the face of Mr Smith sitting just opposite.

'I think you have done your share in that direction already,' said Mr Smith, ignoring the tone and glance, as he smiled tenderly in return.

'Oh, I know what you mean, Mr Smith,' replied Mrs Benjamin, the frown replaced by a

smile, for she had her woman's share of vanity, and saw no reason why her good deeds should not be proclaimed to the world.

'I know what you mean. It's that bracelet I put in the plate one Sunday when Father Donnelly was begging for money to help in some charity or other. That wasn't much to speak of. The diamonds came easy, and went easy. They did a great deal more good in the Father's cash-box than on my arm. My old man was a Jew, to be sure, but he would have done the same. He had a heart like gold. Well, I won't find another like him,' said Mrs Benjamin, with a sigh, as she replaced the jewels on the tray. 'I've waited many a year, and I'll give up looking now, I think.'

'Don't make up your mind yet, Mrs Ben.,' exclaimed one of the men, 'until we see if that blue stone has found a match.'

'I'm coming to them,' cried Mrs Benjamin, gaily, as she placed the tray carefully aside; 'but you'll find yourselves all mistaken, take my tip for that.'

The men drew closer round the table. Mr

Smith's head almost knocked the lamp over as the widow gathered the contents of the casket in her hand, and laid them on the table. They were wonderful stones, all of exact size, uncut, and of various colours. For a moment Mrs Benjamin let the men gloat over them; then she gathered the diamonds under one fat hand, while with the other she drew them out, two at a time, for the inspection of her visitors. The stones were all roughly set in silver, more for the sake of security than the enhancement of their value. A tiny loop in each setting served to join the lot together by a slender silver chain passed through each loop.

'Here is the first pair,' said Mrs Benjamin, drawing two from beneath her hand, and placing them well under the light from the lamp. 'My old man got the first, this one,' indicating the diamond with a shove of her finger, 'from an old Griqua, who had used it as a plug for a hole in an old pipe he had smoked for years. The mate was given me by an Englishman who died of fever the first year we opened the Canteen. Poor fellow, he gave it to me for nursing him,

and on promising him that I would see him buried decently. Well, my old man did give him a proper funeral, to be sure. It cost him a barrel of whisky, which he gave in exchange for a couple of boxes to make the poor lad's coffin. My, but wood was dear in them days!'

The men handled the stones with a touch amounting to reverence, for they were what is like 'the apple of the eye' to the Kimberley broker—black diamonds. Mrs Benjamin held her breath with the excited pleasure of possession. Well she knew that the men examining her beloved gems, holding them to the light, balancing them in their hands, scanning every part of the black beauties, knew to a line the value of every point in the peerless stones. They heeded not her recital of the history of the diamonds. Enough for them that they had never set eyes on such a pair in all their experience in the diamond market.

'The two weigh twenty carats, I swear they do!' cried one, completely carried away by excitement.

Mrs Benjamin nodded as she drew forth a

quartette of stones, shimmering white as the frost points of a glacier. Then followed another pair of enormous size. They shone like the colour of a tiger's eye—a dull, gleaming yellow. The men pounced on them with exclamations of delight. There they lay, genuine yellow diamonds; no off-colour, with its straw-hued tinge, but a genuine yellow, as warm, as deep and rich as the sunlight sleeping in a bit of golden-rod.

'By Jove!' ejaculated one, 'these are rare fancy stones, and no mistake.'

Mrs Benjamin made no reply. Only a red spot on either cheek betrayed her excitement as she drew forth another pair and laid them beside their fellows on the velvet table-cover.

The men made no attempt at comment when their eyes rested on this pair. With the true instinct of the diamond gambler, unlike the gold gambler, they grew silent as their interest and excitement deepened.

Glorious stones they were, indeed, apart from their great size. The light in their depths burned like the glow in old sherry—limpid, warm and deep—the hue of a sun-kissed chestnut.

They were those diamonds dear to the heart of the connoisseur—brown diamonds. For a few minutes Mrs Benjamin suffered the men to handle them, then she drew them away and produced another pair. She placed these before the men with a hand that trembled slightly.

‘I don’t know what kind them are,’ she said, in a low voice. ‘I always feel queer when I touch them. My old man found them in a chamois bag tied by a thong round the neck of a poor lad that was murdered on his claim one night. The boys found him next morning, and brought him to the Canteen. All he had was stolen; the poor fellow was stripped to the skin, and stiff as a board with his own blood. My man couldn’t bury him like that, so he just washes the body himself. The bag was pressed into his chest, as though it had been shoved in by a boot heel. And when my man got the lad washed, he found that it was not a lump of blood frozen to the dead man’s chest, but a bag, and in it them diamonds. Nobody claimed him, nobody knew him, so we kept the stones. I don’t know what they are. They seem to be

full of that poor lad's life blood. I wonder if blood could stain them so?'

The men eagerly examined the stones. Although they listened with becoming attention to Mrs Benjamin's tragic story, they heard it with real indifference, and had no faith in her marvellous theory. Still, it whetted their curiosity as to the real nature of the stones. Lying in the hand, the diamonds were a dull, lustreless white, but once held well up to the light, in such a manner that the rays glinted below the surface, they shot forth sparkles of colour as delicate and rose-tinted as the heart of a sea-shell, while here and there the light caught a flash like the gleam of blood.

'By Jove! they are pink diamonds, and won't they be beauties when they are cut.'

'No, no,' said Mrs Benjamin, solemnly, as she took the jewels away from the man, 'they are no pink diamonds, I tell you; I know pink diamonds. No; them stones are blood-stained. I am as sure as I am living that is so—stained with the poor lad's life blood. God rest his soul!'

All this time the yellow maid had been standing motionless at her post behind the chair of her mistress, her eyes resting on the trellised lattice work screening the verandah without. Suddenly she started violently, shaking Mrs Benjamin out of her sadness as she clutched the back of that lady's chair.

'Trena!' exclaimed the widow, 'you are asleep. Wake up or you'll topple over on the floor. Go, open some more champagne.'

The maid obeyed readily enough, but all the while she avoided looking in the direction of the lattice work.

'Now for the last stone,' cried Mrs Benjamin, her sentiment all dispelled by the champagne.

She drew the diamond forth, and laid it in the centre of the glowing circle cast from the lamp. It looked grey and lifeless enough, but when one of the men held it up, it gleamed blue as a distant star in the lamp rays.

Then she produced the stone given her by the admiring Mr Smith. She paused a moment, and looked quizzingly at his anxious face.

'There,' she said, laughing, as she held the stone forth; 'try them.'

The man holding the diamond taken from the casket took it from her hand, placed it carefully on the table, and laid the one in his hand beside it. The stones matched completely.

Just at that critical moment Trena stooped and whispered something in the ear of her mistress. Mr Smith sprang to her side.

'Your answer, dear Mrs Ben.?' he cried, almost beside himself with joy; 'your answer?'

But the widow's cheeks had grown as white as the pearls glimmering amid the diamonds on her bosom, which rose and fell as though her heart was rocking like a tempest-tossed ship within her breast.

'I'll give you—an answer—' she said, trying to speak steadily as she rose from the table, 'in the morning. Will you go now—gentlemen? Mr Smith, please go.'

The men arose from their seats open-mouthed with astonishment. But Mrs Benjamin's agitation was too real, too sudden for them to think of asking for any explanation of her strange

conduct. Picking up their hats, they left the room together, crossed the trellised verandah, and were gone.

'Put out the light, Trena,' whispered Mrs Benjamin, as she carefully replaced the jewels in the casket, locked it, and then concealed the key in its place in the folds of her gown.

'Lock the door, now—the windows,' she said, as the light went down and the bright beams of the moon spread across the floor. 'Now watch. Oh, God! protect me.'

It was near daylight when Mr Smith was returning from the rooms of his friends, who had partaken with him of Mrs Benjamin's hospitality a few hours before, to his chambers in a lane crossing the street in which was situated the Royal Arcade Canteen. He walked very slowly, with his head hanging in sorrowful cogitations. The strange and abrupt dismissal of himself and his companions by the widow was past his comprehension. Over their whisky and soda and pipes the trio had passed the rest of the night in discussion. What could have been the cause? Was it a ruse of the widow to get out

of her dilemma, or had she been taken suddenly ill? If so, she would be all right on the morrow, and keep her oft-told determination to marry the man who could find a diamond to match the blue stone and complete her necklace.

Finally, after hours of debate, poor Smith arose and, amid the good wishes of his pals, proceeded to wend his way homewards. As his steps approached the corner of the street graced by Mrs Benjamin's establishment, his pace slackened. How was the widow sleeping? Was she scanning that unfortunate stone, looking for some flaw, some defect in size and colour, which might form a loophole through which she could escape from fulfilling her promise? Every man in Kimberley knew of Mrs B.'s necklace, and the bait she had held out for its completion. What a laughing-stock he would be in the market. Every broker in the place had been at work helping him to find that stone, and now, when he had procured it at a cost of thousands of pounds, what a laughing-stock he would be, to be sure.

Mentally he cursed his luck over and over

again, as he strode softly along. The moon hung low, like a round, silver globe in the blue of the horizon. The stars overhead were paling fast. The day would soon be breaking, and the hundreds of dogs skulking through the streets and lanes seemed to know it, as they crept into holes and corners in all sorts of out-of-the-way places. One great, black beast crept between Mr Smith's legs, nearly upsetting him in his course. He raised his stick to strike the animal, but the blow never descended, for at that instant a scream, shrill and prolonged, smote his ears like a shot. It came from the direction of Mrs Benjamin's abode. In his panic he fancied it was the widow's voice. His limbs seemed weighted with lead as he tore through the street. Would he never be there? Louder, more piercing, grew the cries for help. Onward he sped, until the turning was gained, and he found himself within sight of the Royal Arcade. Something white was struggling on the ground in the little garden directly under Mrs Benjamin's verandah. As he sped nearer he could see the form of a man locked in the arms of the

yellow maid, Trena. The two were struggling desperately. 'Help! help!' cried the faithful girl, her voice growing fainter at each call. One or two bounds more down the silent street, and the next moment Mr Smith was grappling with the unknown man. Trena's grasp relaxed as she saw him by her side.

'Oh, Mr Smith! Save her!' gasped the girl, as she lay on the gravelled walk, bleeding and bruised. 'Save my missus.'

'Leave go!' cried the man, hoarsely, as Mr Smith's grasp tightened on the fellow's throat. 'Leave go! Don't you interfere. Leave go! I'm her husband.'

But Mr Smith's hold only grew harder; his eyes filled with a jealous fire that would have destroyed the wretch within his power could a look blast. Now he understood it all. This villain had come to claim her. No; he would kill him first. Suddenly he caught the echo of moving feet—tighter grew his hold. There was a shout, a flash and loud report, and Mr Smith rolled over and over, then lay motionless, with the dead man grasped tightly to his breast.

When he regained consciousness he was lying on the floor of Mrs Benjamin's sitting-room, her tears falling on his face, a crowd of sympathetic constables around him.

'He's all right,' he heard one exclaim. 'Just pour a little more brandy down his throat.'

At this Mr Smith endeavoured to close his mouth, but when the constable hastened to add 'Mrs Benjamin,' the eyes opened with a readiness that sent a smile to every face, despite the presence of that awful piece of bleeding clay stretched there on the walk outside.

When Mrs Benjamin was satisfied that her lover and rescuer was safe, and not done to death as she had feared, she arose from his side and coolly directed the officers to take the thing outside away.

'I haven't seen him for years,' she said ; 'why should I bother about him? Yes, he was my husband, but a bad one. Been on the break-water for fifteen years. He is well out of the way. He came last night to rob and murder me, but Trena saw him at the window, and watched him peeping through the lattice. He

was breaking in when she caught him. Take him away and bury him ; I'll pay the bill.'

She watched until the last of the removal was accomplished. Then she turned and went to the side of the man lying on the couch in her sitting-room.

'Mr Smith,' she said, softly. He opened his eyes and feebly caught her hand. 'It's seven o'clock,' looking at the timepiece on the mantel. 'I said last night I would give you an answer in the morning.' She stooped, and pressed her lips to his. 'Now you have it!'

THE ROMANCE OF A NURSE

MISS MENA MENDIS was one of a family of six daughters, born, brought up and living generally in the famous town of Kimberley. Had Mena been the youngest of this charming family of girls, this romance would never be written, for such a stock of that extremely marketable commodity should have proved a perfect gold mine to the Père Mendis in a town like Kimberley, where the men outnumbered the women to the extent of ninety-nine per cent. men and one per cent. women. But, unfortunately, the per cent. decreased as Mena's years increased, and wives could be had for the mere asking when Mena arrived at the desirable age of sixteen. Consequently, instead of finding her pretty little hand

sought in marriage by half a score of young men, and the nicest diggings in the Diamond Camp, in the shape of a neat little bungalow, handsomely appointed, and in the most fashionable quarter of the town, at her disposal, poor Mena, despite her undeniable beauty, her gentle, refined disposition, her tender, loving little heart, found herself out in the cold, so to speak, and mistress of a noisy, squalid household, where she played the double *rôle* of mother and sister to the five other blooming, mischievous but lovable girls.

Would that I could do justice to the brave, sweet, self-sacrificing like of Mena in those early years of her career; but there are millions of just such brave young hearts being crushed out of youthfulness and happiness by just such noble lives of unselfish devotion to erring parents and exacting sisters and brothers the world over. And, alas! not one in a thousand ever receives the reward of their labours—on this side of heaven, at least. But charming Mena Mendis was born

under a rising star ; though seemingly gentle, and soft and sweet, she had a will of iron in that slender frame, and a strong brain in that pretty head, with its covering of shining, curling locks of brown, and she made up her mind, as soon as she grew to know that she had a mind of her own, to conquer Fate and wring a better portion from that erratic dame than the one which her young eyes saw stretching away into the years lying before her.

No doubt these latent qualities made Mena the gentle autocrat that she was, enabled her to take the leading strings in her young hands and direct the fortunes of that neglected little household into safer channels, made of her the guide and friend of father and mother, the playmate and protector of that brood of pretty sisters. For, sad to tell, the Père Mendis was that most pitiable of wrecks—a dissipated, broken-down gentleman ; and terrible to relate, for this is a true sketch, and the truth must be told, no matter how repulsive—terrible to relate,

the mother followed in the steps of her husband, and was, like him, a wreck, that most fearful of wrecks—a dissipated woman.

It may have been the climate—hot, dry and over-stimulating—the vast stretches of bare, treeless plain, with no verdure but the brown veld grass, so discomfoting to those eyes just fresh from the green vales and leafy hills of England, that created the thirst for drink in the unfortunate pair, or, it might have been the run of ill-luck that made every venture of Philip Mendis a failure; every shilling of the little fortune brought from home vanish in the attempt to build a big fortune out of the few claims bought in the hope of turning out diamonds from the blue soil. Whatever it may have been, Père Mendis yielded to the tide of ill-luck, and soon found himself a mere mine labourer, the big, handsome wife a clattering barmaid in a disreputable canteen, and a shanty full of clamouring little ones on his helpless hands.

In those early days of the Diamond Camp,

habits of dissipation were the order, nights of carousal followed days of hard work at digging in the claims. Whisky was the staple drink, and vice of every kind prevailed unchecked and unheeded. Consequently little, if any, attention was paid to the fact that every night Philip Mendis and his wife reeled in drunken sympathy home together to the little shanty with its brood of neglected babies. But the drunken father was never harsh, the dissipated mother never cruel, and, somehow, despite the vice holding sway over that miserable home, the light of love never went out, and therein lay its redemption. The holy love of those innocent, childish hearts stood between the brutalised parents and their utter destruction.

With every additional year came an additional toddler to the group in the squalid shanty, until Mena attained her fifteenth year, and with its advent there also dawned upon her a terrible realisation of the degradation of her parents and the wretchedness of her surroundings. The innocent eyes were

opened to the dangers threatening her young footsteps, the innocent mind slowly comprehended the meaning of the coarse jests hurled after her mother's tottering steps, and the sneers and insults marking her father's homeward course, when night after night she went forth to meet them, and guide them through the dark lanes leading to their miserable dwelling.

One day—an awful day, a day never blotted out from the fair life of Mena Mendis—a stranger came to the shanty in search of her father, so he said. He was fair and handsome, and the children crowded round his knee in delight at the glittering bits of silver he lavished upon them, all the while his burning eyes devoured the lovely face of Mena, but no sweet words could lure her to his side. She stood coldly aloof and calmly discussed his business with her father. Suddenly the stranger sprang towards her. There was a swift, sharp struggle, followed by the ringing sound of blows from a sjambock, which sent the chil-

dren cowering with fright into the far corner of the room, and the next moment the stranger fled, half-blinded by the well-directed blows from the leather thong in the grasp of those small, strong hands.

In the tiny loft, forming her bed-chamber, above the living room, Mena lay outstretched on the bare floor and sobbed away the long, hot afternoon, while the little ones huddled together, hungry and silent, in the room below, not daring to disturb their sister's grief.

In that brief struggle Mena had stood for the first time face to face with the demon of man's sinfulness. No father's hand to save her, only an outspoken prayer in her heart for rescue from the blazing light shining like a danger signal in the stranger's eyes. Before that light had vanished the innocence of childhood, and the eyes of Mena's soul awoke in the presence of the angel of virtue.

What words can ever tell the anguish of that realisation! The grief, the disgust, the bitter truth that dawned upon Mena as she recalled the stranger's words; he had told her that she was

the child of a drunkard and a wanton—her home a living disgrace to the town. Oh, the anguish of it all! A wave of hatred swept over her soul as she thought of her erring parents. She would fly far away from them—fly, never to see them, never to be disgraced by them again. Just then the soft voices of the children floated up from the room below. A great throb went through her heart and melted her anger, like snow beneath the rising sun. The children, her darlings—could she forsake them? No. The poor father, whose voice was always gentle—could she leave him? No; and the mother—oh, the mother—she could feel the soft kisses from those poor, swollen lips upon her face, could see the smile in the bleared eyes—oh, the mother, the dear, dear mother, beloved with all her faults, her sins—could she leave her mother? No. And beside the spirit of virtue uprose the spirit of duty, and they folded their wings around the soul of Mena, never to forsake her from that hour henceforth.

That evening no Mena came to meet Père Mendis and his wife. Her absence alarmed them sufficiently to half sober them as they

hurried homeward to the shanty. Mena lay still and white on her little cot in the garret, her temples burning with fever and her senses wandering. But the children told of the struggle with the stranger, and how their sister beat him off with the sjambock. Père Mendis looked at his wife and ground his teeth. Together they watched by the little cot through the night, and when the morning dawned Philip Mendis went forth to his work in the mine—a sober man for the first time in years.

Mena rose from her cot of fever after many weeks, so changed her sisters scarcely knew her. She went about the little shanty grave and pale, but took up the burden of her duty—the care of the little ones and her erring parents—with a brave and willing heart. Matters improved slowly; the Père Mendis drank less, and would gather the children round his knee, and try to impart to them some of his almost forgotten knowledge. The mother likewise sought to overcome her dreadful craving for whisky, and returned home earlier from the canteen. But the improvement was so slow, the outlook so

dreary to Mena's young eyes, that many sleepless nights and dreary days of depression came to daunt that courageous little spirit.

'For God's sake, Mena, come and look at my boy Piet. I believe he's dying!'

The woman, a gaunt specimen of a digger's wife, stood in the open door of the shanty, wiping the tears from her eyes with the end of her apron, while she cried in a hoarse, pleading voice,—

'My boy! my boy! He's dying!'

'I'm coming,' answered the voice of Mena from the garret overhead. 'Don't fret, Mrs Vogt, I'm coming at once.'

In a few moments Mena appeared carrying some phials in one hand, while with the other she adjusted the sun-hat on her head.

Mena found the little sufferer lying on a cot in the hot room of the bungalow, a few yards away from her own shanty domicile. He was white and breathless. Mena stripped the little body and gave it a gentle sponging, bound up the little head, shaded the window with a blanket, and sat down beside the cot to watch

and keep the flies away. Something in her presence seemed to revive the child—no doubt the cool and quiet and soothing sponge bath—for in an hour or so he breathed calmly, and sank into a refreshing sleep. After a time the doctor dropped in, and stood for a second looking from Mena at her post to the sick child. Then he felt the pulse, and looked again in a curious fashion at Mena.

‘So, the little rascal’s alive still?’ he said, carelessly. ‘I expected to find he had pulled up stakes and moved off the claim. Ahem! What did you do?’

‘Sponged him at once,’ answered Menas, briefly, without raising her eyes from her little charge.

‘Ahem! Are you going to look after him?’ he said, a trifle anxiously. ‘It’s typhoid, you know.’

‘Yes. I shall nurse him till he’s all right,’ answered Mena.

‘Then I’ll be back this evening,’ said the doctor, as he went towards the door. ‘Quiet and nursing is all he needs now.’

The next day little Piet was pronounced out

of danger, and Mena returned to her duties at home.

One morning, about a fortnight later, Mena was surprised to see the doctor's horse stop before the shanty, and the doctor dismount and enter the living room, which was clean and shining under the application of plenty of soap and water, manipulated by the busy hands of the children at Mena's direction.

The doctor stood in the centre of the room, turning his broad-brimmed hat in his hands, as he scanned the homely chamber.

'Good morning, Miss Mena,' he said, as she appeared. 'I—ahem!—I have called to ask you a favour.'

Mena bowed her brown head gracefully, but did not speak.

'What a lot of style she has,' thought the doctor.

'There's some very bad fever cases,' he went on to say, abruptly, 'up in the town, and I want a good nurse for old Beers. Now, I think you would be just the one to help me. The pay will be first-class.' Here he looked round the

mud walls of the shanty with an expressive glance, not lost on Mena. 'Will you come? I noticed how successful you were with that boy Piet,' he went on before Mena could answer; 'and I made up my mind you were cut out for a nurse—it's a good, respectable way to make a living in this town.' Here he paused and gave Mena a straightforward look that sent the blood in a flame to her cheeks. 'It's a good chance for you, Miss Mena. I'll help you all I can, for, if ever a girl needed helping, and deserved it too, you do—by God! Now, I am going to give you a chance. Will you take it?'

'I will come,' answered Mena, steadily, choking back a sob of joy, and lowering her black lashes, that the doctor might not see the tears shining in her eyes; but the doctor knew they were there, and brushed one from his own as he mounted his horse.

And thus began Mena's career as a nurse.

Four years later, and Mena Mendis, the pretty daughter of drunken Père Mendis, loved and respected by all Kimberley as the bravest little

woman in the town, whose gentle hand had smoothed the way to death for hundreds of stricken miners, and whose skilful, faithful nursing had called back to health and strength as many hundreds more.

One evening there was great bustle and preparation of an unusual kind afloat in the cosy cottage of the Mendis family, now no longer domiciled in a shanty on the edge of one of the diamond mines. That shabby home had been discarded long ago, as soon as Mena's efforts had accumulated money enough to secure their present abode. There were roses clambering round the pretty portico and creeping over the daintily - curtained windows, and softly-shaded lamps gave forth a mellow light as the girls, all grown to beauties now, went to and fro in their work of packing Mena's boxes. For Mena was going away, up country to Johannesburg, to take up her work of nursing in the fever-stricken town. Mena's old friend the doctor was sitting by her side in the handsome little drawing-room, looking with proud complacency on the beautiful face of his *protégée*

as he gave her many directions about conquering the foe she was going to fight in the far-away Golden City.

‘Nurses are scarce there, Miss Mena,’ he said as he held her hand in a farewell grasp on the threshold of the portico; ‘and don’t overwork yourself.’

‘I’ll try not, dear doctor,’ answered Mena, in a low voice.

‘And, Mena,’ said the doctor, drawing closer to her, ‘try not to forget me. Mena, you are my little girl, my angel of good! Don’t forget the old doctor.’

‘No; I shall come back soon,’ said Mena, softly.

‘Not to me, dear Mena; to somebody better, I hope. There,’ kissing her hand, ‘God bless you!’

The next morning it was a brave coachful that rumbled out of Kimberley behind a pack of twenty sturdy mules. Nearly half the town was gathered round the coach office, although the hour was early and the clock just pointed to six, to wish Miss Mena Mendis God-speed

and good luck on her mission of loving work. And Mena's sweet face, framed in its fetching black bonnet and spotless white strings tied under the round, dimpled chin, looked as happy as though she were bound on her wedding trip, instead of a journey with, perhaps, death at the end to greet her.

So said the people !

Oh, the long, hot, stifling day, with no cloud in the sky, no rain in the air, nothing but blinding, blazing, molten sunshine, whirlwinds of red dust careering in the golden distance, armies of ants and hosts of flies invading street and dwelling ; truly a terrible time, for the drouth, that awful monster with jaws of fire, eating up every green thing, swallowing every drop of moisture, sucking the very life blood out of palpitating heart, and licking dry the nervous force of man with its deadly tongue, held sway indisputable, had settled down on the Transvaal for weeks and weeks previous.

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It was many months since Mena had left Kimberley that early morning in the Johannes-

burg coach, and as she sat through the hot afternoon by the cot of a dying digger, fanning away the flies and cooling the parched lips, her mind found rest in the memory of the sweet, quiet, home cottage and its green, shaded portico. She felt faint and ill, and the close odour of the room, with its half dozen cots of dying men, sickened her. For a moment she felt her senses reeling, then she recalled the faces of the girls and the dear eyes of their mother, now bright and clear again, freed from the curse of drink; and the tender smile on her father's face, that face no longer swollen and disfigured with debauchery; and she thought of it all as her work, her blessed work. Then the faintness vanished and she was strong again—it was her tonic, that consciousness of her redeeming work. The hot air, the fatigue, the weary watching—all was forgotten, unfelt, in the stimulus of that chain of endeavour happily accomplished.

A strange gurgling sound from the patient beside her drove those meditations away; she knew the sound well. In an instant she held

the struggling form in her arms, and pillowed the head on her shoulder. There was a long gasp, then the eyes opened and gazed into hers with a last look of recognition.

‘Thank you, sister,’ whispered the dying man. ‘Oh, mother!’

Mena answered the cry by pressing her lips to the clammy forehead. There was another gasp, and the head sank gently on her shoulder; this time never to rise again. She laid the form back on the pillow very tenderly, with a silent prayer, and went to work methodically to summon the attendants and remove the cold occupant for another in the throes of fever, waiting for the vacant place. And so, day after day, she stood ever in the grim presence of death, wan and thin as that shadowy messenger himself.

‘Miss Mena,’ said the head physician of the Nurses’ Home one morning, a few days later, ‘I have a most complicated case on hand; one that requires the most skilful treatment, and I wish to send you to take charge of it.’

‘Why not bring the patient here, doctor?’ answered Mena.

‘That is impossible,’ said the doctor; ‘he is one of the great mine owners; a most important man, you know; a life that would be a great loss indeed. I could not think of bringing him here.’

‘Then, doctor, I am sorry to refuse you. I cannot leave all my patients for one. These are poor fellows in every sense. No, I cannot leave them, not even the Kaffirs over in the shanty there. One life is as precious in my eyes as another. Kindly excuse me now, doctor, I have someone waiting for me,’ and Mena turned to resume her work of serving out the portions of medicine to the two young nurses waiting in the tiny closet that passed for a dispensary.

‘A most important man, forsooth,’ thought Mena; ‘a rich one, too!’ and for some indefinable reason she felt her heart growing rebellious against the unknown patient of the doctor.

The young nurses greeted her impatiently. They were filled with zeal, and could not brook any delay in ministering to their patients.

Bright, handsome girls, they had been recruited from what was called the best society of Johannesburg, as, in fact, all the nurses of those days were; and Mena smiled, well pleased at their enthusiastic spirit in the good cause.

When they had departed with their day's store of physic, Mena returned to her special ward; the little room, scarcely big enough for a good-sized bed, was crowded with its six narrow white cots, two of which were empty, for the fever seemed to have abated within a day or two back.

Throughout the morning, Mena could not get away from the thoughts that pursued her of the doctor's patient. Heretofore she had not been thrown into contact with the men of wealth and position on the Rand. They had escaped the fever so far, and her work lay only with the diggers and poorer class of men. She felt one moment guilty of neglect to her duty in refusing the doctor's request, and the next glad that she had refused, for her gentle heart

was very bitter at times with the memory of those early days of disgrace and privation in the shanty on the mine in Kimberley. She loved the poor, the outlawed and the abandoned, for she understood them. Had she not suffered herself, and the bitterest of suffering God's hand could ever inflict, the knowledge of opprobrium undeserved, the knowledge that her soul was as unsullied, her heart as pure as the snow on God's highest mountain peak. And yet she had been insulted, scorned.

Suddenly with these thoughts a flood of memory brought back to her that one terrible day, when the hot kisses of the stranger burned on her face that day in the little shanty. With a shudder she recalled the one instant in which her heart beat with a wild, sweet sensation at the touch of those lips; and then, as she swayed the fan across the face of the patient beside her, a great prayer of thankfulness filled her soul, that the strength had been granted her which gave her power to resist those kisses and wield the sjambok in her defence.

'Sister Mena,' said the grave voice of the head physician beside her, 'I have brought my patient to you. If you cannot save him, nothing will.'

Mena started from the little stool by her patient's cot, like one awakening from a dream.

'I beg your pardon, doctor,' she faltered.

'Don't mention it,' answered the doctor, mistaking her meaning.

She hastened forward, and, drawing the two cots together, began to arrange them into one bed. Soon all was in readiness, and a litter entered the room, on which lay a moaning figure swathed in wrappings like a mummy.

Many days and nights of tireless care and watching followed the advent of the doctor's patient. Mena never left his cot for a moment. At first a terrible delirium held him in bonds of fire. Then the fever slackened, and he lay white and helpless in the depths of exhaustion. All the while his great eyes, shining like sapphires in the darkened room, would follow every movement of Mena as she went about her duties. At times he

would whisper to himself, and once Mena caught the echo of his words as she hovered over him, smoothing the pillow and arranging the bandages on his head. With a start she drew herself up, and fled to the little dispensary, her cheeks flaming, her hands clasping her bosom, and a strange, sweet flutter at her heart. Then she crushed all feeling beneath her strong will, and, with a cold, calm face, resumed her place by his side.

But the wonderful look in those sapphire eyes thrilled her until her heart beat to suffocation, and she grew hard as steel in her touch and stern of glance to hide the tumult in her breast. Then the sick man would drop the white lids over those glowing eyes and sigh wearily.

‘Doctor,’ said Mena, one day when the fever was conquered and his patient was fast gaining strength, ‘I think I shall take a rest; I am quite worn out. Miss Mitchell will look after your patient.’

The doctor looked narrowly at the sweet

face, pale as marble, beneath the white cap, while he stroked his beard in silence. Mena thought he had not heard her request, and began it again, but the doctor interrupted her by saying,—

‘I think, sister, you do need rest. I shall have you on my hands next.’

‘Thank you, doctor,’ answered Mena, turning away with a listless step.

That afternoon she began her preparations to return to Kimberley. ‘The sight of the dear girls, and dad and mamma, will make me happy again,’ she thought, as she went about her work. Soon the boxes were ready, and the pretty black bonnet with its snowy strings adjusted, and Mena went to have a last look and word of farewell with her beloved patients. Time was pressing, as she had to go to the town before night fell in order to catch the coach in the morning. Consequently she went softly past the door of the room where the doctor’s patient lay. With resolute step and head held high, she began to descend the short flight of steps

leading from the portico surrounding that dreaded room to the garden, when a voice arrested her, saying,—

‘Sister, Miss Mena, come back!’

It was the doctor. He stood in the open doorway. There was no escape, so Mena reluctantly retraced her steps, and in a moment was in the room by his side.

‘Are you going away without bidding my patient—your patient—whose life you have saved, good-bye?’

There was no answer. He led her to the cot, drew up a chair, and then went out, closing the door softly behind him, leaving those two alone together in the darkened room.

The doctor smoked one, two, nay, three cigars, as he paced the little garden. An hour passes away, and then, with a look of satisfaction on his face, he opened the door and entered. The nurse’s bonnet lay on the foot of the cot, and the lovely face of its owner was rosy with blushes, while he of the shining sapphire eyes held forth a white, transparent hand. saying,—

‘Come in, doctor; I have made my confession, been forgiven, and shall make my darling the “missus” as soon as you will pull me out of this confounded cot. And Mena is going to be the richest woman in South Africa, and shall build a dozen hospitals if she chooses, eh? Kiss me again, darling. It’s all right now, for you are going to be my dear little missus, “my wee wife.”’ And he kissed the sweet face, that he had kissed under such different circumstances once before, again and again, while the doctor looked on smiling, as he stroked his beard.

‘HIS LAST FAD’

‘THIS is an extraordinary thing!’ exclaimed Sir Reginald Fulton, upsetting his coffee in his excitement, as he glared at the letter in his hand. ‘By Jove! it must be a joke.’

He left the table, forgetting the comfortable breakfast, and walked to the window.

The sweet spring morning filled the street with radiance, but Fulton was oblivious of everything but the letter he held. He re-read it with a most comical expression of perplexity in his face.

It ran thus:—

‘DEAR FULTON,—You were not yourself last night; your conduct was quite inexplicable. However, for the sake of our old friendship,

I am ready to overlook it; but Gertrude is not so easily appeased. Come and dine with us on Wednesday—*en famille*—and we will talk it over.—Yours, etc.

‘LAWRENCE.’

‘Talk it over. What does he mean?’ cried Fulton.

He touched the bell. An elderly man-servant entered the room.

‘Connor, did anyone call last evening?’

‘No, Sir Reginald,’ replied the servant.

‘I failed to keep an engagement through your neglect. It is the first time you have done such a thing since you have been with me. What was the reason?’

The man looked round the room uneasily. He glanced at a door partially concealed by a heavy crimson drapery. Seeing it closed, he seemed relieved.

‘The fact is, Sir Reginald, it was quite impossible to awaken you in time to dress for the ball.’

‘What nonsense is this, Connor? I had only

intended to doze for a few minutes. When I woke it was two in the morning.'

He looked sternly at the servant, and was surprised at the look of fright in his face.

'Come,' he said gently, 'out with it, Connor. What troubles you?'

'Well, Sir Reginald, I came in at half-past nine, and laid out your evening clothes; but when I tried to wake you, why, you would not stir hand or foot. I tried a long while to rouse you; finally I went to call James, for I thought you had a fit. When we came back you had disappeared, your evening suit as well.'

'Disappeared!' cried Fulton. 'Connor, what the deuce is the meaning of this crazy story?'

'Oh, Sir Reginald, it's gospel truth.'

'Go and bring James here at once.'

Connor hurried away.

As soon as Connor left the room, Fulton went to the crimson-draped door, tried it, and finding it locked, gave a nod as much as to say, that's all right, pulling the drapery entirely over it. Just then the servant entered.

'James, I want to hear your account of this story of Connor's about last night.'

'Yes, Sir Reginald. Connor came to me in a great state. He said you were ill. We hurried back, but you were gone. Then I says to Connor, "Sir Reginald is dressing," and Connor went to your dressing-room, but you wasn't there, and your dress suit was gone too. Connor and me was amazed. We knew you could not dress and go away in that short time.'

'And you looked everywhere?' cried Fulton.

'Yes, Sir Reginald, except'—looking uneasily towards the crimson *portière*—'in your laboratory.'

'Do you mean to tell me,' cried Fulton, in a rage, 'that you two idiots did not see me asleep in the arm-chair by the window? Go, leave the room, and remember I shall not put up with a repetition of such confounded stupidity.'

The servants left the room. They were more perplexed than angry at their master's rage. They knew he was a kind master, but a little peculiar, they thought, since he had that strange

thing brought to the laboratory. He always had some sort of fad, Connor would say ; but this was the strangest of the lot.

The door had scarcely closed after the servants, when a low, gurgling laugh floated into the room. It seemed to come from a hollow recess.

Fulton turned to the crimson *portière* and called ‘Coming.’ The laugh ceased. He proceeded to fill up a plate with dried fruits, which he placed on a tray with a decanter of wine and glasses. This took a little time. The delay did not please the owner of the laugh, for an impatient exclamation in a strange tongue came from the other side of the *portière*.

‘Be patient!’ cried Fulton, in the same tongue, going to the door, tray in hand. He swung back the drapery, and, taking a key from his pocket, unlocked the door, entered, and carefully fastened it after him.

In a little while Connor brought in two letters, and placed them by Fulton’s plate on the breakfast-table. He did not seem to mind his absence, and merely glancing at the crimson

portière, with a little grimace, he left the room.

Presently he returned with James. They kept up an animated talk in pantomime, as they advanced on tip-toe towards the laboratory door.

James applied his eye to the keyhole, Connor his ear to the door. Both held their breath, striving to understand the murmured sounds on the other side of the door.

'It's my opinion master's off his head,' whispered Connor; 'we must do something about it.'

'Come away, he'll hear you,' said James.

Just then a loud exclamation they could not understand, and seemingly close to them, made them start, and rush to the door of the breakfast-room, where they stood trembling.

'I'm sure he's being murdered,' quavered James.

'Nonsense! Here he comes!' and Connor pulled the frightened fellow after him through the door, just as the other one was unlocked, and Fulton strode into the room carrying the empty tray.

He sat down at the table and touched a bell.

‘More hot coffee, Connor;’ then, seeing the letters, he asked when they came.

‘A few moments ago, Sir Reginald;’ then Connor left the room.

Fulton opened one of the letters and began to read.

‘What in the name of all that is blessed can this mean?’ he cried.

The letter ran thus:—

‘DEAR SIR REGINALD,—I shall be most happy to see you to-day at three. Gladys has told me you wish to see me, as you have something very important to tell me. I think I know what it is you have to say. You were rather strange last night, but I will forgive you if you justify my opinion of you.—Yours very sincerely,
MARGARET DE MAUBRAY.’

He seemed lost in the most helpless amazement on reading this, and it was only the sight of the other that brought him to his senses.

He tore it open in the hope it might throw some light on the De Maubray letter, but it only added to his perplexity. It ran thus:—

‘ECCENTRIC CLUB, PALL MALL.

‘DEAR FULTON,—You made a great hit here yesterday. We were all delighted with your recital of your Egyptian experiences, and your election is now safe. I hope to see you here as a member in a few days’ time.—Yours always,
JACK WELLESLEY.’

‘By Jove! there’s a big mistake somehow or other! I could not be in two places at once. I must find out who’s at the bottom of all this. I’ll make them laugh on the wrong side of their mouth before I have done with them.’

He looked at his watch—it was just eleven. Putting the letters in his pocket, and snatching up his hat and cane, he started for the Eccentric; but, as he was leaving the house, a brougham drove up to the door, and his friend Lawrence sprang out.

‘Well, old boy, I’m just in time, I see. Which way are you going?’

‘I’ll be hanged if I know,’ said Fulton, gazing at his friend in bewilderment. ‘I feel like a Chinese puzzle. I wish someone would unravel me.’

Lawrence laughed, and taking him by the arm, put him into the brougham.

‘Drive to the city!’ he called to the coachman, and then, seating himself by his friend, he cried,—

‘I say, what pranks you played last night!’

‘For heaven’s sake, Lawrence, what are you talking about? I swear to you I never left my chambers for a moment last night.’

Lawrence gave him a long look of astonishment. He saw that Fulton looked perfectly serious.

‘Well, by Jove!’ he cried; ‘is it possible that you have a double?’

‘You may well call it a double,’ groaned Fulton. ‘I think it more than a double—a triple or a devil. Here, read these,’ he

added, as he gave Lawrence his morning letters.

He read them quite slowly and carefully, returning them to Fulton when he had finished.

'If I had not seen you, I mean your double, last night, I would have thought these all a joke; nevertheless, dear boy, it looks very serious. The letter from Lady Margaret is genuine; I know her writing well; but, at anyrate, it is a useful double if it has got you into the Eccentric Club.'

Poor Fulton looked so hopelessly dazed that Lawrence was quite moved to pity.

'I say, don't fret, old boy,' he said; 'we'll sift these through, but we must do it at once.'

'Tell me,' said Fulton; 'what did I—I mean that confounded double—do at your house last night?'

Lawrence could scarcely answer. He was seized with an irresistible desire to laugh, but the sight of his friend's woe-begone face made him restrain himself.

‘Well, your—I mean this abominable double was very natural until we were at dinner, and then he played the most amazing tricks with the table furniture. He appeared to swallow three wine-glasses at a gulp, which he presently extracted from the pockets of some of our guests. This little trick we affected to applaud, but when it came to dancing a kind of war-dance with the soup-tureen balanced on a fork, we broke up and made a rush for the drawing-room.’

‘Horrible!’ groaned Fulton.

‘Your—I—I mean that devil of a double kept us in a sort of trance, so paralysed were we with the feats he accomplished in the drawing-room. Oh, it was awfully funny!’

Here Lawrence, no longer able to control himself, burst into a roar of laughter.

‘Oh, oh! I’m eternally disgraced!’ cried the wretched Fulton.

‘There, there, old boy, don’t take it so hard,’ said Lawrence, as soon as he had recovered his gravity. ‘I’ll devote the rest of the day to this matter. We’ll dine together.’

He then told the coachman to drive to the Eccentric Club.

They found the secretary of the club in his office. He greeted them cordially, Fulton especially, whom he shook warmly by both hands.

'Sir Reginald, I am delighted! Most happy to welcome you as a most valuable addition to our already distinguished list of members.'

Fulton did not trust himself to answer. He bowed gravely.

The secretary was evidently anxious to speak of the interesting proceedings of the previous night, and Lawrence, who was as anxious to hear of them, opened the subject by expressing regret that he had not been present to enjoy his friend's success.

'You certainly missed a wonderful exhibition of the occult power of second sight,' said the secretary. 'Sir Reginald also gave us a most interesting lecture on the customs, art and language of the early Egyptians, which he illustrated by writings in the most ancient forms of hieroglyphics. We never

heard anything to equal it before. It was a decided sensation.'

Lawrence gravely requested to see the specimens of hieroglyphics, and, as soon as the secretary left the room to get them, Lawrence gave his friend a sound slap on the back.

'Don't give in!' he exclaimed. 'Carry off all the honours. By Jove! your double is a clever one.'

Here the secretary returned and handed Lawrence a roll of papyrus. He opened it and displayed a startling array of hieroglyphics. Lawrence stared at the parchment in dumb surprise.

'This is more wonderful still,' said the secretary, producing a small earthen vase of grotesque design. 'We saw Sir Reginald transform an ordinary wine-glass into this remarkable example of ancient Egyptian pottery.'

'Well!' ejaculated Lawrence.

Fulton stared for a moment at the vase, and, turning suddenly, bolted out of the

room before the astonished secretary could speak.

'I think Sir Reginald is overcome with all your praise; he's very modest, you know. Don't fail to invite me to your next lecture,' said Lawrence, as he hurried after Fulton.

He overtook him rushing down the steps of the Club. Fulton was greatly excited. He caught his arm to support himself.

'Lawrence!' he gasped, 'take me home. I think I understand these diabolical tricks!' and, tottering like a drunken man, he got into the brougham.

Lawrence, thoroughly alarmed, endeavoured to quiet him.

'I'll see Lady Margaret after I have taken you home. Then rest all you can, and when I return, we'll devise some means of catching this rascally double.'

He saw Fulton safely to his chambers, and proceeded on his mission to Lady Margaret.

Fulton let himself in so cautiously that not the faintest click of the lock could be heard.

He stole on tip-toe through the passage

dividing his chambers, and softly opened the door of the sitting-room. He entered, glanced round uneasily, as though expecting to see someone. The room was empty; all was quiet, the silence broken now and then by the faint rumble from the street below.

He threw himself, exhausted, on a couch. He tried to think, to realise the strange, perplexing events of the morning. Soon a peculiar faintness crept over him. It seemed that some invisible force was raising him. He felt himself slowly floating upwards; then his body seemed to disintegrate, and he lost consciousness.

Then a strange thing occurred. The door, covered with the crimson drapery, noiselessly opened. A figure glided in and stood by the couch, gazing on Fulton. Every feature in the face of the sleeping man was reproduced with startling resemblance in the face of the figure beside him.

Hours passed away, daylight drifted into twilight, still the motionless figure kept watch over the sleeping man. At last the

sound of voices and footsteps broke the silence. The figure glided back to the laboratory door, and disappeared just as Lawrence entered followed by Connor.

'Ah, there he is,' said Lawrence, seeing Fulton on the couch. 'I'm sure he has had a good rest.'

Connor went quickly to the side of his master.

'Oh, Sir Reginald, I did not know you were here. Are you ill?'

Fulton, roused by the servant's voice, opened his eyes.

'Is that you, Connor?' Then, seeing Lawrence, he held out his hand. 'Back again, Lawrence? Sit down. I'm a little seedy still. Connor, serve dinner, if it's time.'

Lawrence drew up a chair, and sat beside him.

'Dinner, and a bottle of old port will pull you together.'

'What about Lady Margaret?' cried Fulton. Lawrence shook his head.

'Not a word about her, or any of this affair, until we have had dinner.'

'Come, then,' said Fulton, as Connor entered, 'let us get at it at once. I can scarcely wait so long.'

While at dinner Lawrence chatted gaily, and Fulton seemed to brighten up a little. When the cloth was removed, and the servant brought on the coffee and cigars, he could restrain himself no longer, and burst out impatiently,—

'Now, Lawrence, out with it. What about the De Maubrays?'

Lawrence said quietly, as he looked gravely at him,—

'It is all settled. You are engaged to Miss Gladys de Maubray, the prettiest heiress in London.'

'What! I engaged? Impossible! You are joking, Lawrence.'

Lawrence calmly puffed away at his cigar.

'Yes, it's true,' he said, looking across the table, with a smile at Fulton's consternation 'You, or your double, went to Lady de Maubray's ball last night, danced with Miss Gladys, proposed to her, was accepted. Lady

Margaret is quite delighted to receive you as a son-in-law. I congratulate you, old boy! You have a sweet prize in that charming girl.'

For a moment Fulton's face flushed with pleasure, then he seemed deeply agitated; he rose from the table and began to pace the room. Lawrence looked at him curiously. What the devil has come over Fulton? he thought; but he smoked on in silence.

At length Fulton paused in front of him.

'Lawrence,' he cried, 'I cannot marry that lovely girl, while the incubus which my rashness has fastened upon me still clings to me. Oh, God!' he groaned, 'shall I ever be free from it?'

'My poor boy,' said Lawrence, 'confide in me; tell me this trouble. I swear I will do all in my power to help you.'

'Lawrence, dear old boy,' said Fulton, in a low, broken voice, 'we have been friends since boyhood. I love you as my own brother; but what I have to disclose is so strange, so terrible, it may drive you from me in horror.'

He shuddered and turned away.

'No, no, Fulton, don't turn away. I will help you, no matter what it may be. Trust me ; I'll stand by you, old boy.'

He caught Fulton's hands, and pressed them in his warm, firm grasp. They looked in each other's eyes, and a sigh of thankfulness escaped the wretched Fulton. He threw his arm across Lawrence's shoulder, and leaned on him, completely unnerved.

'Come, I'll show it you,' he whispered, hoarsely drawing him towards the crimson *portière*. He unlocked the door and they entered together.

The first glance round the room made even Lawrence's strong pulse quicken.

It was a long, lofty chamber, lighted at one end by an oval window of blue-stained glass, through which the moon's rays filtered with a weird light.

Hangings of a sombre hue, covered with enormous hieroglyphics, draped the walls. On a tripod burned a lamp of some sweet-scented oil, which gave forth a pungent perfume, the pale flame threw a flickering light over a pile

of cushions near by. On them was stretched the form of an old man, wrapped in a robe of some brilliant-coloured stuff, caught round his waist by a girdle of gold. Jewels on his breast and in his turban gleamed, in the faint light.

A great electric battery, its crystal wheels reflecting with ghostly effect the stray beams of the moon resting on them, occupied the centre of the chamber.

Fulton drew his friend to the couch of cushions.

He sleeps now,' he whispered. 'Look at him well.'

Lawrence gazed in silence on the awful face. The blackened skin was drawn tightly over the muscles, the lidless eyes were covered with a grey film, a tattered, straggling beard partially concealed the lower part of the jaws, the nose was pinched and sunken, and all the features bore the traces of a repulsive decay.

Lawrence shuddered, and drew Fulton gently away. They passed out of the room, closing

the door after them and drawing the *portière* over it.

‘It was my cursed enthusiasm that brought this upon me!’ exclaimed Fulton.

‘Tell me all about it, and where you found that dreadful fossil. Oh! it makes me creep to think of it,’ said Lawrence, pouring out some brandy and drinking it off.

Fulton began to pace the room. He did not answer for some time. He seemed lost in thought. At length he said,—

‘It was when I was in Thebes. I was never weary of prowling among the tombs of the old temples. The rows upon rows of shrivelled mummies had a most curious fascination for me. One day I wandered out of the way of the ordinary sightseer, and came upon a small tomb in which was a single mummy. It had such a strange attraction for me that I haunted the tomb for days.’

‘I am not surprised at that,’ said Lawrence; ‘you always had a fancy for everything Egyptian. What a fad you had for studying hieroglyphics; you almost lived in the museum.’

'Yes,' resumed Fulton, 'and through this fad I was able to decipher the inscription on the tomb. It was the mummy of a priest of high caste, and some thousand years old. A most irresistible desire took possession of me to steal it. After days of untiring persuasion, I succeeded in reconciling James to the scheme.'

'Poor James,' said Lawrence, 'what a martyr he must have been.'

'Yes, his terror was really comical, but in the end he quite caught the spirit of the adventure, or the spirit of my flask perhaps, as I had to give him something to keep him up. It was not easy work groping in the dark and dragging the mummy after us. We had to do it all by night; during the day it was hidden in some convenient corner, and James kept watch.

'After much trouble, we got it safely to London and installed in my laboratory. Now, at first I had no idea what I should do with it. But, as I had been studying and experimenting with electricity, the thought struck me to try the battery on the mummy.

‘I removed the body from its shell, and gave it daily a strong electric bath. For some time I could see no effect, but I became intensely worked up over it as the experiment increased.’ Fulton paused and drank a glass of brandy. ‘At last my patience and labour bore fruit—a slight difference began to appear in the size of the mummy.’

Here Lawrence started and was about to speak. Fulton motioned to him to be silent, and resumed,—

‘Hourly it became more palpable. The muscles slowly filled out, the skin lost its shrivelled brittleness. Then I applied all the strength of the battery to the heart. The bandages of cere-cloth had fallen away under the action of the electric fluid—the body only needed that magic pulsation to make it a living being.’

Lawrence sprang from his seat and gazed in horror at his friend.

‘Impossible!’ he cried, ‘impossible!’

‘My rapture,’ continued Fulton, ‘at the wonderful success of my experiment nearly

crazed me. One night, worn out with the excitement of watching the mummy, I fell asleep, forgetting to turn off the current. The dawn was creeping into the room when I was wakened by a strange cry! The mummy was alive!'

A long pause followed. Fulton wiped the cold drops that had gathered on his face. Lawrence averted his head; he could not look at his friend's agony.

Fulton resumed in a low voice,—

'It is beyond human language to describe the remorse I felt when I met the reproach in those lidless eyes. The mummy spoke in a strange tongue, but I understood. I seemed to remember it like some long-forgotten strain of music. "Why have you brought me back to life?" it said mournfully. "Would you know who I am? The reflex of your soul. This shrivelled shell of a body is yours. Thousands of years ago your soul dwelt in it. You will never know rest again until you have destroyed me—until you restore me to my cerements and the tomb.

'Oh, the horror!' groaned Fulton, 'that filled me when I heard these words. I wept, I prayed, I implored the poor mummy to give me some help—to recall the long lost art of restoring him to his former state. It was in vain, and since that awful night I have lived years of misery!'

The wretched man seemed about to faint. Lawrence led him to the couch and forced him gently down; he then brought some stimulant which he made him take.

'My poor boy, don't despair,' said Lawrence; 'there is surely some way out of this horrible business, but you need rest now above all things.'

Fulton wearily closed his eyes. After a little while he was sound asleep.

Lawrence sat beside him, with his face buried in his hands, striving to understand, to devise some means of helping his friend, when he heard a long, deep-drawn sigh close to him. He looked up, and started from the chair in horror as he beheld the double of the previous night. His eyes wandered from the face of the figure

to that of the sleeping man in amazement at the perfect resemblance. For a moment he thought he was dreaming, and he rubbed his eyes vigorously.

The figure seemed to read his thoughts.

'No, you are not dreaming,' it said. 'I am the double of your friend. All he told you is true, but he does not know that when he sleeps his soul is still awake, that I must take his form and thus carry out the punishment imposed on his sacrilegious act. In our ancient Egyptian law self-destruction is the worst crime against nature, therefore I could not give him the secret of restoring me to that condition in which he found me. You are his friend—if you have the devotion and courage to learn the secret—come!'

The figure glided to the laboratory. At the door it turned and made a beseeching gesture. Lawrence felt himself drawn after the figure, and they entered the laboratory. The door closed noiselessly after them.

Hours passed before Lawrence re-opened the door and tottered to a chair by Fulton's side.

He sank wearily into it and fell into a deep sleep.

Daylight was shining through the blinds when he awoke. He felt cramped and stiff, as though he had passed through some great trial of strength.

Fulton also awoke and stared at him.

'By Jove! it's morning. How tired you look, Lawrence. I have had a strange dream. Let us see if it is true. Come into the laboratory.'

As they entered, a strange sight met their eyes. The battery was completely destroyed, its crystal wheels shattered to atoms. By the side of the wreck, enclosed in its old shell, lay the mummy.

'Hurrah!' cried Fulton; 'it was not a dream after all.'

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A few months later the society journals gave glowing descriptions of the marriage of Sir Reginald Fulton, Bart., and Miss Gladys, only daughter of Lady de Maubray. His last eccentricity was manifested by the lovely wedding gifts to the bride and bridesmaids of bracelets

studded with diamond hieroglyphics, and a bangle in the shape of a golden mummy.

The poor old mummy, the last of Sir Reginald's fads, found a congenial corner in the British Museum.

THE CURSE OF THE CANTEEN

JOHANNESBURG was in a ferment of excitement one Monday morning; the cause thereof—the arrest for treason of a reverend gentleman, who had allowed his zeal to out-balance his prudence in an open and vigorous attack on the Rand officials, from the Landdröst down, in his speech at a great demonstration held the previous Saturday night against the promiscuous licensing of that blot on the white fame of the Camp—the canteen.

The reverend gentleman spoke out boldly and emphatically, as any free-born Englishman and wearer of the sacred cloth should do, in the cause of humanity. The poor black humanity teeming in the mines along the reef, working from morn to night at the

golden treasure therein for the benefit of his millions of white brethren far over the seas; and his white brothers of the gold-fields were at last awaking to the fact that body and soul, brain and muscle, nay, his very life, was being sucked out, gorged upon by the human vultures, perched on the edge of every mine, the canteen keepers. The eyes of the people were upon these 'vampires' now, who secured licences whereby they fattened on their unholy trade without the Government caring a rap whether they were fitted for the post or not, so long as the dues were promptly paid. Rascals who were ready enough to 'chuck' a drunken Kaffir out, but who would suavely invite the 'gentleman' to have another drink as long as the poor devil had a sixpence in his ragged trousers pocket. The moment that it was gone the way of its fellows, down the neck of the infamous bottle of adulterated whisky, the vulture of the canteen sent the poor brute reeling into the road, ripe for murder, pillage and crimes too revolting to find a name in decent society.

The people had come to the end of their patience, and were determined to wrest the licensing of those nests of drink from the control of a few paid officials, and have a voice in the matter themselves; hence the monster gathering of thousands in the Amphitheatre that Saturday night, at which the reverend gentleman had denounced the President and his *régime*; and for which he was politely marched off to gaol the next Monday morning.

And this is how all the trouble came about.

Jan Hansman ran one of the most prosperous canteens on the Jumper's Reef. It was a long, low, iron shanty, perched at the foot of a stunted kopje, and within easy walking distance of the vast mine throbbing all day and night with the music of its monster stamps, and through which swarmed in and out, like black bees in a gigantic honeycomb, the hundreds of Kaffir miners employed in crushing, digging and sorting the precious quartz.

Hans was a stolid-looking Boer and a

veteran in the canteen-keeping line. He owned a score or more of those man-traps scattered along the reef, upon which he kept a careful watch, sometimes dropping in at the lot of them in one evening. Very naturally he prospered on his gains drained from the pockets of the poor, stupid Kaffirs, and was able to make a most respectable figure in society. His pretty villa in Dornfontien, though modest, was replete with every comfort; his wife drove a comfortable cape-cart and pair of good horses, his two girls were pupils of the leading seminary for young ladies in Jeppestown, and every Sunday found Hans and his family regular attendants at the Dutch church. No hand was more heavy when the collection went round, no voice more strident in prayer, than that of the very respectable and God-fearing Herr Hansman.

The prim lady-principal of the "Young Ladies' Select Seminary" little dreamed that the very liberal payments for her two favourite pupils, so punctually made every quarter, flowed from the very dens of drink and

murder surrounding her charming and chaste abode, which were a source of constant dread and virtuous indignation to her. The good old pastor saw not the blood, often carefully cleaned away, still faintly clinging to the welcome silver deposited with a liberal hand in the collection plate, or if he did, no doubt thought it but a trace of the red dust of the veld which clung tenaciously to everything in the Rand. And no less deceived were the good folk who associated daily with the secret drink purveyor. For had not Hansman fine sheep ranches, was he not the owner of numerous bullock teams, which employed all his time in looking after? hence the frequent encounters with Hans at all hours of the day and night on the reef and open veld.

But Hans did not deceive all the community of Johannesburg. A few knowing ones, Boers like himself and high in office, were well aware of the fact, since they granted him the very licences by which he conducted his vile business. They closed their eyes and opened their hands, to the satisfaction of both sides on

these occasions. The other contingent in the old Boer's secret were of too low an order to be dangerous, and were only too glad to keep his name out of all the trouble for the generous pay they received in 'running' the canteens apparently on their own account. These were ne'er-do-weels who had been swamped in the quagmire of the gold craze. Men who had come to the fields with their all, or without it, in the hope of making a speedy fortune, and who found themselves at last in the gutter from whence Hans rescued them, only to steep them deeper in iniquity.

The canteen perched opposite the 'Simmer, and Jack' was a fair specimen of all of the Boers' establishments. Rudely, but substantially constructed of the best corrugated iron to be purchased in the colony, wide windows, wide doors and still wider chimneys, plain and squat enough outside, the interior was a model of cosy comfort, and rendered attractive by its gaudy bar, brightly-kept lamps and inviting benches. It was divided into an outer room, the bar, and an inner one constituting the

sleeping and living room of the ostensible canteen-keeper.

The whole shanty was raised a couple of feet or so above the ground on stone supports thereby leaving a space beneath which formed a refuge for all manner of refuse, and afforded shelter to any stray dogs or wandering Kaffirs who found it to their taste. A short flight of broad, wooden steps led to the door of the shanty, and at the same time concealed from view the space underneath. A rough coat of grey paint spread over the exterior imparted an air of neatness while giving a certain distinction to the shanty, which singled it out among its fellows of a dull red or glaring blue along the reef. Ungainly outhouses of various sizes finished this unattractive picture of dust, squalor and treeless kopje, watched over by a vicious and ugly brute in the shape of a huge black Kaffir dog, who dosed all day at his post on the doorstep, and bit, fought and snarled all night.

It was Saturday afternoon, just a week previous to the big demonstration meeting in

the Amphitheatre mentioned, and Jan Hansman was riding briskly along the reef, for he had a busy day, it being the monthly pay day at the mines, and Hans was anxious that the stock in his various canteens should be equal to the demand. A fresh relay of "Cape Smoke" was necessary here and there. This canteen needed a few dozens more of its special brand, and that was an extra supply of Cape brandy, for Hans was most desirous of satisfying the varied taste of his black patrons. All had been neatly and surreptitiously supervised when Hans, for the last time, reined up at the grey shanty, and, dismounting, hurried into the bar, while a dirty Kaffir boy led the horse quickly out of sight in the rear of the building.

'The Swig's arrived, Gov,' said a great hulking specimen of humanity lounging behind the bar, a battered digger's hat, encircled by a faded blue silk handkerchief, tilted on the back of his head, a short pipe in his mouth and a general air of dissipated slovenliness in his dress marking him as one who had fallen so low that every instinct was lost in the one great

craving for drink. 'We'll have a brisk trade to-night,' continued the man in husky tones; 'come in and rest a bit in the back room, Gov.'

'No, I have not the time, Yack,' answered the Boer. 'Vas that last lot jost—jost the right sort, eh, Yack?'

'You bet, Gov,' laughed the man. 'I've had a taste, and if it don't burn up the gullet of every blamed Kaffir, I'll eat my head. It'll take a month o' temperance feed to cool their tongues!'

The Boer replied by a complacent grin and an approving wink at his worthy confederate.

'Vat is the liddle missus about, Yack? Can she give me a drop of dat goot coffee she make so vell?'

'Cert, Gov; jst step in and she'll have a cup ready in a jiffy,' answered the man, as he turned to the door of the inner room.

'Stay, Yack,' said the Boer, softly; 'I think you do wrong to keep the liddle missus about to-night, eh? Send her into Camp to see some friends, eh, Yack?'

‘Don’t you fret, Gov,’ rejoined the man. Sal is my right hand. Why, she can keep them crazy Kaffirs straight as a trivet. She don’t mind their howling. She’s not afraid of a drunken Kaffir, nor a dead one, for that matter, neither!’

‘Hump!’ muttered the Boer; ‘I think the missus had best be oud of the vay to-night, eh?’

‘Oh, all right, Gov; if you don’t like it, I’ll send her off at once, but let her make the coffee first,’ returned the man, with apparent submission as he entered the back room.

‘Blessed if the old duffer ain’t gone on my little missus and wants to save her pretty skin,’ he muttered to himself.

‘I say, Sal,’ he exclaimed to a little frowsy-headed figure perched on a box by the open window, ‘here’s the Gov, and he wants a cup of coffee right away, so stir yourself.’

‘All right, Jack, dear,’ answered the girl, as the man returned to the bar.

The Boer was placidly smoking his pipe as Jack entered, but to the eyes of the man who understood every change of his stolid face there

was a look of disquietude there not to be concealed from his keen gaze.

‘What’s on your mind, Gov?’ said Jack, abruptly; ‘spit it out!’

‘Vell, Yack,’ said the Boer, slowly, ‘I am jost a bit uneasy; dar vas so much troubles aboud de licence.’

‘Oh, don’t you worry about that, Gov, leave that to me. Haven’t I lied successfully for you before?’

‘Ya ya, Yack,’ said the Boer, approvingly; ‘bud’—here he leaned over the bar and whispered a word into Jack’s ear—‘he tells me to look oud, the peoples won’d mind their own business—they wants to take the licence away; eh, Yack, vat’s to be done?’

‘Well, if you’ll take my advice, Gov, let the matter alone; it’s only a temperance fad of those cursed Salvationists and some other religious hypocrites; even the women, curse them! are mixing up in it; and when women get their fingers in anything they always make a mess of it; just you keep quiet and let the people talk themselves out; they can’t coerce the

Volksraad ; law is law in the Rand, and Dutchmen are too wise to let women govern them.'

'Ya, ya, that vas all right to listen to, Yack, bud it von't vash. I have a liddle plan, Yack, a little plan that vill vork best ;' here the Boer paused and looked slyly at Jack.

'Well,' at length exclaimed that worthy, impatiently, 'spit it out, Gov !'

The Boer hesitated. With all his cunning he feared the big ruffian on the other side of the counter. He would not have hesitated to ask him to do some villainous work, knowing well the other relished anything daring or murderous, but—here Hans, noting the scowl on Jack's face, hastened to say in a wheedling tone,—

'Vat do you say to a nice liddle trip to Pretoria, you and the missus, eh, Yack?'

'No thank you, Gov ; it's very kind of you, but the missus and self are satisfied here ; it's too much trouble travelling just now, and,' with a wicked leer in his eyes, meant to be sarcastic, 'the wet season's coming on ; we're snug enough here !'

'Ya, bud, Yack, I think it is besd to close up

the canteen for a few weeks—until the trouble is over, eh, Yack?’

‘Oh, that’s your plan, old fellow, is it?’ said Jack, with apparent indifference. ‘All right, I’ll make tracks for Natal; I can’t afford to be out of a job, you know!’

‘No, no, Yack,’ said the Boer, anxiously, not wishing to lose so valuable an ally, one who could sell more whisky and kill more Kaffirs than all his other confederates put together, ‘don’t you go away.’

‘Then,’ cried Jack, emphatically, ‘don’t you shut up this canteen, for I’m no good if not behind the bar.’

‘All right, Yack, all right!’ exclaimed the Boer, as the door of the inner room opened and Sal cried gaily,—

‘Here you are, old man; come right in, the coffee’s nice and hot.’

‘Ya, missus,’ said Hans, with a bland smile, as he followed the girl and prepared to drink off the steaming, fragrant cup which she held in one little hand, while she dusted the seat for him with the other. ‘Ya, that is very

good, very good. Don't you neglect business, Yack.'

Jack took the hint and retired to the bar, inwardly chuckling at the admiration of the old Boer for his Sal, while the Boer sipped his coffee and endeavoured to craftily win over the little missus to the plan rejected by Jack.

Sal was a waif whom Jack had picked up in the Cape and married in a fit of inexplicable goodness—a generous impulse which proved an unending conundrum to him. He loved, if any feeling in his debased nature could be called by such a name, the pretty helpless, creature, young enough to be his daughter; with a fierceness which expressed itself oftener in blows than caresses, and secretly admired, while he openly hated her fidelity and truth, which, try as he would—by cruelty and by coaxing—he could not bend to his evil wishes. Her babyhood and childhood had been passed in the slums of Cape Town, hence she was borne one morning in the arms of an old Malay fisherman, who

had found her crying lustily on a bit of the *débris* from a wreck of the previous night, floating out at sea where he cast his nets. The Malay took her to his heart and never parted with his treasure until his death cast her again adrift on the world.

The innocence she had never known in girlhood she found in wifehood. Love taught her the lesson of virtue. Love for the brutal, crime-sodden husband created round her an armour of purity, which even his daring scepticism feared to attack too recklessly. And though she returned caresses for blows, gentle words for curses, Jack trembled secretly sometimes at the fearless beauty of those clear, brown eyes, and for very shame restrained some of his most evil inclinations. Not that Sal set herself up as any judge or restraint upon him; poor child, she knew no law but sin, and yet, strange to say, she was free from every evil impulse. Jack knew it, and in his secret heart marvelled at and adored her for her innate goodness, even when he tried with oaths and blows to force her to partake of the

drink which she loathed. She was the sunbeam of his lost and clouded path, the final link between he and redemption.

Sitting on her little perch beside the window, Sal listened to the flattery of the old Boer, with a smile of pity on her full lips; she could not turn up her pretty nose with contempt at his sly insinuations, as that delicate member was already 'considerable of a snub,' but she could shake her little head till the short, auburn, frowsy curls glinted like gold [in the sunlight, streaming through the window, in the protest against his honeyed words.

'Jost you coax Yack to take you a liddle trip to Pretoria, Missus Sal, and I will give you the prettiest watch in the Camp, eh.'

Sal held her breath an instant and closed her eyes—the vision of the watch dazzled her. Jack had so often promised her such a treasure.

'Come here,' said the Boer, coaxingly; 'sit on my knee, and I will count you out the pretty golden sovereigns to buy it yourself.'

‘Not if I know it,’ laughed the girl, gaily. ‘You just count them into that cup, there’s a dear.’

‘All right,’ said the Boer, dropping the gold pieces one by one into the cup. ‘You coax Yack—’

‘I say, Gov,’ exclaimed Jack, putting his head in at the door, ‘time for you to git. I see a lot of Kaffirs coming across the reef from the compound ; they’ll be here in a minute.’

‘Ya, I am coming. Good-bye, Missus Sal.’ Then in a whisper, ‘Don’t forget your promise.’

‘No,’ whispered Sal, as she seized the cup and its precious contents, while the Boer vanished into the bar, and in a few moments was riding rapidly away.

Many hours later, as Jan Hansasman was returning on his nightly tour of inspection, a sound of shouting suddenly greeted his ears, causing him to urge his horse onward by a sharp stroke of the whip. The yells grew louder as he neared the grey canteen, and once or twice he fancied he heard a woman’s scream. Muttering curses on the stupidity of

Jack for permitting the noisy crowd to get beyond his control, he galloped furiously to the scene.

The sight which met his eyes was awful enough to chill even his sluggish blood. A crowd of staggering, screeching, frantically drunken Kaffirs had invaded the bar and were demolishing all before them. In their midst could be seen the towering form of Jack, fighting desperately with the lot—a knife in one hand and a brandy bottle in the other. His face was fearfully gashed, and he seemed to be making herculean efforts to quell the maddened Kaffirs. Jan saw one after another go down under the well-directed blows of the ugly knife in his hand; but what brought the old Boer to his senses and aroused his wrath was the pillage going on under his very nose, and for which he had no remedy. It cut him to the heart to see bottle after bottle of his precious whisky and brandy disappear in the black hands stretched up now and then to the neatly-arranged shelves. Grinding his teeth with

rage, he looked on from his hiding-place, where the rays of the midnight moon threw the deep shadow of the shanty. Utterly powerless to stay the terrible work, and afraid to call for assistance, lest he should be discovered, he, cautiously dismounting and tethering the horse, stole in the shadow to the rear of the house and peered in at the window. The little chamber was swarming with Kaffirs fighting and screeching in their drunken rage.

Sal was nowhere to be seen. Returning to the front, he crouched beneath the steps and listened. The hoarse voice of Jack seemed to be growing weaker. At length it ceased altogether, and Jan began to breathe more easily. No doubt Jan had settled the trouble at last. But his hopes were dispelled, as the door was burst open and a swarm of Kaffirs rushed out into the night, laughing and yelling hideously as they sped away towards the mine. Jan waited another five minutes, but no further sound came from the bar. Jack had cleaned them all out thought

he, with a sigh of relief, as he crept to the door and looked in.

For a moment he stood there dazed and dizzy ere he could realise whether the scene before him was a dream or hideous reality. Blood was everywhere, trickling from the counter, bespattering the walls, and flowing like a river from the bodies of the Kaffirs lying on the floor, and, most terrible sight of all, was the form of Jack writhing and moaning on the ugly heap. Jan approached him, all his caution for the moment lost in his terror. As the eyes of the dying wretch fell upon the Boer, he arose with a terrible effort and glared at him an instant in silence, then with a horrible cry he lurched his mangled body forward and endeavoured to seize the Boer.

‘You—you have done for me—you and your hell fire liquor. May the curse of the canteen — follow — you — curses — oh, God!’

There was the sound of a hoarse rattle, a wild clutching at space of the bloody hands,

and Jack reeled forward dead at the feet of his master.

The Boer shuddered as the curse rang in his ear; but suddenly recovering himself, he bent over the body and fumbled in the pockets. There was nothing there. Carefully making his way over the bleeding forms of the Kaffirs, he got behind the bar and unlocked the drawer of which he always held the key, the money being deposited therein by means of a slit in the counter. His eyes glistened as they rested on the snug little pile of gold and silver, which he speedily transferred to his capacious pocket. Then he extinguished the spluttering oil lamps, and, creeping to the door, let himself out, being very careful to close it securely after him.

Quickly untethering the horse, he mounted, and was about to ride away, when the horse suddenly shied and nearly threw him as it was leaving the shadow of the house. The Boer did not dare to look behind him as he urged the horse onward. If he had done so, he would have

seen the white, drawn little face of poor Sal gleaming out of the shelter of the space beneath the shanty, whence she had dragged herself to die of the cruel wounds inflicted by the reckless hands of the drunken Kaffirs. The moon grew dim behind a big bank of clouds, and in the welcome darkness he sped towards the Camp, thereby escaping the eyes of a couple of mounted police, just beginning their nightly tour of inspection.

Guiding the horse over the soft moss of the unbroken veld, which sent forth no echo of the passing hoofs, he reached his villa in safety, just as the mounted police paused a moment before the grey shanty to listen. All was quiet, the lights out, and, reassured they rode slowly on, leaving the grey shanty in peace, until the morning would reveal the secret of that bloody night of drunken crime

A BLACK KING *

IT was night, still and profound, with a silvery coolness shed by the myriads of stars glittering and paling, floating and shooting in the high deep heavens above. The great bosom of the veld revelled silently in the refreshing light of those millions of stars, and returned her meed of thankfulness in the shape of a vapouring dew, faint as a sigh and invisible as a breath, exuding from her brown surface.

A man was stretched out at full length on an old red Kaffir blanket spread on the slope of a kopje, sleeping the deep sleep of exhaustion. Hours before, when worn out with his long trek, he had cast his blanket there, and sank down, hungry and sore of foot, unconscious that, near at hand, just round the

* An incident in the life of the late King of the Matabele—Lobengula.

angle of the kopje, were food and drink in the humble dwelling of a Boer shepherd.

Motionless as a sculptured image, the starlight softening and refining the outlines of his dark, powerful face, lighting up the superb limbs gleaming like polished bronze in the mystical glow, the man looked the embodiment of a savage king. And king he was, though shorn of the head dress of shining black plumes, the girdle of monkey skins, the white frills of ox tails, the great white shield and royal assegai. These had been left in the kingly kraal in distant Matebela, while their owner set out on his secret mission with no burden save the weight of a red blanket, a girdle of cotton cloth wrapped round his loins, and his favourite knob-kerrie in his hand.

At intervals the sleeping man smiled in his dreams--the smile swept like a flood of light across the sombre character of his face, banishing the lines of cruelty and crafty power in the sensual but nobly modelled features--a smile exceeding sweet and gentle in expression,

revealing the innate goodness and magnanimity of this black warrior while it told of the visions floating before his closed eyes.

For, within the portal of dreams, he is back in the royal kraal. He beholds once more the dance, the men drawn up in a great circle, brandishing their spears together in time to the rhythm of their steps, while he, just crowned with the insignia of his father, the great and formidable Mosilikatse, leads the festive measure with proud steps.

How brave a show the men present, arrayed in full savage regalia, head-dresses of nodding plumes, bunches of monkey tails drooping over hip and loin, arms and ankles adorned with the snowy tips of ox-tail, their shields of black and white bullock hide shining in the sunlight, the flashing of a thousand assegais as they advance and retreat singing lustily to the measure of the dance. A warrior steps forth and takes his stand in the centre of the circle, with waving of shield he chants of his deeds in war, levelling and charging his assegai to indicate all the enemies he has slain in

battle, another and still another springs into the circle to tell in the same weird pantomime the record of their bloody conquests amid the cheers and shouts of approval from their companions.

The smile on the face of the sleeping man deepens, the hard lines on brow and round the heavy lips soften into an expression of tenderness, as in his dream the form of his sister floats before him in the dance—his favourite sister, the peerless, magnificent Nui-Nui; her eyes flashing like black diamonds, her full red lips wreathed in a gleeful smile, the tip of her tongue just visible like the pink petal of a rose between the teeth, white as rarest ivory, parted in the panting labour of the dance; her whole massive but symmetrical body gleaming at every pose like the sheen of satin. A hundred pendant-gilded chains encircle her waist, while a short skirt of woven ox-hide conceal her thighs without retarding the play of the shapely moulded limbs adorned with anklets of tiny bells. Around the smooth, full throat a necklace of golden beads, interspersed

with lions' claws, is fastened. Across her brow a woven cord of gay-coloured beads, from which towers the hair, sable as night, and fine as spun wool, crowned by a fascinating little head-dress of the feathers of bee-eaters' tails. Her arms, laden with bracelets, gracefully balance a great shield of bullock hide surmounted by a jackal's tail.

The sleeper smiled again and again, and his lips as though in response to the song of the imposing Nui-Nui, as his eyes follow her stately gyrations. Slumbering there on the old blanket at the foot of the kopje, oblivious of the grass-stunted plain of the Transvaal, the sterile stretches of granite hills and treeless wastes through which he had trekked for weeks, his spirit revelled once more in the charming scenes and stirring action of the distant kraal, conjured up by the spirit of dreams.

The rich masses of trees, dark and green, spread their generous shade around the kraal, where the huts nestled together like golden bee hives, and the herds of cattle, fat and sleek, the flocks of sheep and goats browsed

peacefully in the long yellow grass, groups of natives in all the naked splendour of savage manhood amused themselves lazily. Bevvies of maidens—tall, erect and grandly moulded—bearing in their shapely arms huge calabashes filled with meat and beer for the daily feast; over all, a sky blue and fleckless as a deep-sea sapphire. Sighing, the sleeper forgot the pain and weariness of his self-imposed absence from that sylvan scene.

Like a sky suddenly overcast with darkness, the smile fled from the sleeper's face. A frown bent the broad, black brows, the mouth grew stern and determined, while the muscles of the massive neck started and stood out like whip-cords. The dreamer was again in council, sitting amid the head men of his nation. He was resisting with vehement eloquence the efforts of the Indunas bent on persuading him to accept the chieftainship of the people. He was pleading for the rights of his lost brother, son of his mother's favourite sister, to whom, as his elder brother, the chieftainship belonged, urging with such pas-

sionate intensity the justice of a search for the missing heir on the crafty, reluctant Indunas, that he clenched his hands and swung his great arms aloft in his dream. When the dream had vanished, the stars were waning, the heavens waking from the spell of night beneath the warm touch of the red dawn flashing gloriously across the east, and the sleeper moved, turned his face from the glittering light, and went forth once more into the realm of dreams.

This time his face seemed transformed with a smile of tenderness and love, for now he was in the presence of his favourite wife, sitting beside the great mat, in the middle of the black, polished mud floor, whereon reclined the lithe form of his beloved, her dark eyes beaming on him in sympathy and admiration as he unfolds the plan of his flight in search of that lost brother. A strange, sweet odour fills the air of the hut; it comes from the balls of crushed herbs and flowers with which those beauties perfume their surroundings. The sleeper's broad breast, now tinged

a rosy hue in the dawn, rises and falls with the sighs of regret awakened by the perfume of his dream—now his face again changes, it is shadowed by a sadness which even the glowing light in the east cannot soften, he is alone on his long journey to the Transvaal to seek his missing brother, Knuman, son of his father and heir to the honours thrust upon him by his people. And thus dream weaves itself into dream until the web is broken, and the sleeper sinks into the dreamless abyss of oblivion.

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A little child came slowly round the edge of the kopje, his favourite playground. A dog was following gravely at his heels. There was no necessity for scamper or hurry, since these two were the only playfellows in that lonely region, therefore, with no one to dispute their right to hunt the lizards in the crannies, or challenge them to a romp, they trotted leisurely along until they reached the slope of the kopje with its slumbering trespasser. The child uttered a soft exclamation as his eyes rested on the face of

the man stretched out on the blanket, while the dog sniffed and wagged his tail joyously.

‘Kuma! Kuma!’ called the little fellow several times. But no response came from the sleeper. For a few moments the child waited patiently for some sign of the man’s awakening. Finally he turned and ran swiftly round the corner of the kopje. The dog, however, seemed to think it his duty to watch, and crouched in the sand near the blanket. The morning sunlight beamed bright and warm, the hot breath of the sultry air swept over the sleeper’s face. He moved slightly, whereupon the dog raised his head, but dropped it again as the man continued to sleep. Presently the child appeared round the kopje bearing in his hands an earthen dish, which he carried with great care. Approaching the man, he placed the dish beside him, and called repeatedly, ‘Kuma! Kuma!’

At length the childish voice penetrated the man’s slumber, and he opened his eyes slowly till they fell upon the little figure before him.

‘Ethla’ (cat), ‘Kuma,’ cried the child, delighted at his awakening. ‘You have returned. Why did you stay away so long? See, I have brought you food. Ethla.’

The child drew the dish nearer, and placed his little hand caressingly on the dark head.

‘Lungili’ (good) ‘Kuma,’ he cooed, ‘to come back to your umfana, lungili Kuma.’

The child clapped his hands gleefully while the dog joined his merriment by barking lustily.

‘Umtwana!’ (child), said the man in a deep voice, ‘I am not Kuma.’

As he spoke the child shrank from him in alarm, while the dog sprang to his feet and began growling.

‘Umtwana, be not afraid,’ he continued, softening his voice, then stretching forth his hand he said more softly still, ‘Eza!’ (come).

The child gazed at him in terrified astonishment as he spoke, and when he put out his hand the little fellow fled screaming round the kopje, followed by the dog. He could hear the child’s cries growing fainter, and

then dying away as he arose and gathered up his blanket. The fright of the child was a matter of indifference to him, and he gave no thought to the meaning of its prattle. But the beauty of its eyes and shiny hair, its fair skin and rosy lips, lingered in his mind as he began to eat the contents of the dish. Presently he fell to wondering at the ease with which the child spoke his native tongue; musing over these things he ate slowly, and when the bowl was empty placed it upside down on the veld and prepared to set out on his day's trek.

Meanwhile the dog and his young master sped along the narrow path in the veld, worn by their footsteps to and from the playground on the kopje, until they came in sight of a small dwelling surrounded by a deep portico, the adobe walls and thatched roof, with its overhanging eaves, brown and dust-stained. Not a tree, not a shrub appeared to soften the wild aspect; a few sheep browsed in the distance, the only riches of this home in the wilderness.

The cries of the child mingling with the furious barking of the dog brought a man to the door, where he stood, pipe in hand, calmly awaiting their approach.

‘Dada!’ exclaimed the boy, rushing into his father’s arms, ‘Kuma has returned; but not our Kuma. Oh! I am afraid, dada. Send him away’

‘So,’ answered the father, smiling as he soothed the child, ‘Kuma has returned. Well, we shall bring him with us to the home, eh?’

A big, florid woman, her yellow hair and blue eyes still beautiful despite the harsh influence of years of farm life on the veld, sharing the rugged duties of her Boer husband, hurried to the door.

‘What is the trouble with our Fritzchen?’ she inquired, anxiously.

‘Nothing, wife,’ answered the Boer. ‘He has only met a Kaffir on the kopje whom he believes to be Kuma. I go now to see who it is.’

‘By the Almighty!’ cried the woman, snatch-

ing the boy and pressing him to her breast, 'my Fritzchen is going mad; he's getting the fever.'

'There, there,' said the Boer, placidly, 'be quiet; don't frighten the child. I return soon.'

'Yebo! yebo!' sobbed the boy, speaking in Kaffir in his grief, as he nestled in his mother's arms.

'Yebo, yebo, wami Kuma' (yes, yes, my Kuma).

The Boer set out in the direction of the kopje, taking the narrow path worn by the feet of his child.

The dog advanced, half in doubt whether to remain with his young master or follow the old one. Canine curiosity prevailed, and the little animal ran on in the Boer's footsteps, taking the precaution, however, of ceasing his barking, as though he feared to frighten away the intruder of the kopje.

'The Matebela during this time had adjusted the blanket across his shoulders in such a manner that the ends hung down his back and over his breast, thereby affording a certain

protection to his body from the rays of the sun, now growing intensely hot. Then he bent forward and arranged the numerous curious bracelets of woven and beaten gold and copper encircling his ankles. There appeared to be a significance of some sort in the act, for he turned the ornaments round and round several times, while he muttered what might have been an incantation.

The African nations have strange, peculiar, religious rites that are Oriental in their character and picturesque in their poetic simplicity. Supernatural powers are attributed to animals as well as inanimate objects. Personal ornaments are handed down from generation to generation, in the belief that the qualities, such as bravery, success in war, and longevity of their former owners descend with them. There is also a barbaric pomp attached to their mystic ceremonies; the songs, incantations and war dances are enhanced by all the savage paraphernalia of feathers, skins, horns, hair and teeth, shields and weapons of every description, fantastically carved gold and

silver bangles, earrings and jewellery of rude but artistic workmanship are lavishly used to decorate the body. They also possess a highly dramatic instinct, for the great religious orgies before and after the battle, conducted by the clear light of the full moon. The grotesque, the grand, the terrible and the beautiful are elements that enter largely into these moonlight rites. Their superstitious reverence for the sun is truly Oriental, as well as their reverential fear of the weird and mysterious. An African warrior will never set out on any expedition, warlike or peaceful, until the sun shines on his steps.

No doubt the Matebela was actuated by some occult influence of that sun worship, for, as he swung the knob-kerrie in his hand in a dexterous and mysterious manner, he faced the sun three times, waving the weapon aloft, and muttering to himself, then he turned his back and walked with a long, imposing stride from the kopje.

He did not see the form of the Boer advancing round the corner of the low hill

towards him, until the man was face to face with him. Stopping abruptly in his walk, the Matebela drew himself up and stood motionless, a formidable figure in his great height of fully six feet four inches, and gazed with a stern yet dignified aspect at the man before him.

The two men stared at each other for some moments in silence. The one short, fair and bronzed with exposure, the brown beard and hair seemingly tinged a warm ruddy hue by the blaze of the African sun. The other, tall, erect, with an indescribable air of majesty, despite the faded red blanket hanging around his person. The sable features betraying neither emotion nor inquiry of any kind, but rather indifferent surprise that the man should so plant himself in his way.

Not so the Boer. His face expressed complete and overwhelming discomfiture, his skin seemed to blanch beneath its sunburnt hue, the grey eyes seemed starting from their sockets, while the hand holding the long Dutch pipe trembled visibly.

‘Kuma?’ he gasped. ‘God Almighty! It is Kuma!’

‘Kabo’ (no), answered the Matebela, the deep tones of his voice ringing out like a bell against the rocky sides of the kopje. ‘Kabo—mene akako Kuma!’ (I am not Kuma).

At the sound of the voice the Boer recovered his equanimity, but still stared in surprise, while he slowly shook his head as though in denial of the evidence of his senses

‘Why do you call me Kuma?’ said the Matebela, calmly. ‘Who is Kuma?’

The other nodded once or twice as though trying to solve some question in his mind, and finally answered by a question.

‘From whence do you come?’ he said, speaking in the language of the Matebela.

For answer the black man turned on his heel and resumed his stately stride.

‘Do not go,’ exclaimed the Boer, following him. ‘Come with me to my indhlu’ (dwelling) ‘and I shall tell you the reason I asked you that question.’

The Matebela followed his steps around the kopje and across the little path in the veld toward the homestead, while the dog, who had been a quiet witness of the scene, capered around his heels, barking joyously, as though in approval of the turn of proceedings.

The child and his mother were sitting at one end of the living room when the Boer and his companion entered. When the huge shadow of the Matebela fell across the door the woman started and looked up. Then, as her eyes rested on him, she gazed for an instant with a look of terror on her face, and straightway uttered a scream that sent the Boer to her side.

‘Be not afraid, Irena,’ he said, soothingly. ‘Go bring some coffee.’

But the woman paid no heed to his words. Covering her face with her apron, she remained seated, shuddering and moaning the while.

‘It is nothing,’ said her husband to the Matebela, as he pushed towards him a three-legged stool. ‘Shalo wena’ (seat yourself).

The Matebela obeyed, while the Boer re-

plenished his pipe and seated himself on another stool. His wife still continued to tremble and cover her face, while the child clung to her skirts and looked gravely and earnestly with his big blue eyes at the native. The boy no longer feared anything with his father near by. There was rather a look of expectancy on his bright face. The terrier crouched near his playmate, his shaggy little head between his paws, while his glittering eyes looked solemnly at the Matebela.

‘And now I will tell you,’ began the Boer, ‘the little history of one who was dearly beloved—our bound boy. I got him from Kanda, a Zulu Induna. He was said to have come from Zambesia, to have been stolen from one of the kraals of the great King Mosilikatse, by a warrior of the nation. That,’ said the Boer with a shrug, ‘had nothing to do with me. I liked the umfana’ (boy). ‘He was strong, tall and good-tempered, and the missus,’ nodding in the direction of his wife, ‘was also pleased with his fine look, and we received him with the usual understanding

that he was to work for us until the age of sixteen, when we were to give him that which we possessed—a bullock, a litter of sheep, a blanket, a staff and a small sum of money—and send him back to the Induna from whom we had received him.’

‘So, so,’ exclaimed the woman from the cover of her apron. ‘We would have sent our Kuma back. So, so.’

‘Yebo!’ continued the man. ‘The God of Abraham and Jacob prospered us while the black bound boy lingered beneath our roof. Our sheep fattened and multiplied, and the desire of our hearts was at length granted us, the desire of years of patient prayer—a son was born to us.’

‘Amen,’ murmured the woman, softly, from the folds of her apron.

‘Kuma loved our babe like a brother. He taught our beloved Fritzchen his first steps.’

‘Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord!’ sighed the woman, tearfully.

‘He served me as a loving son—not as a boundman, neither as a slave. The indhlu

was bright and joyous for his presence. He believed in our God; he carried within himself a Christian heart.'

Here the sphinx-like countenance of the Matebela lost its inscrutability for a second, as a heavy frown lowered over the great dark eyes.

'Yebo!' resumed the Boer. 'He became my son, washed white in the waters of Jordan—one of the Lord's elect.'

'Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord!' moaned the woman.

'For seven years he held life, upright and faithful as our bound boy, and then the waters of Death from the river that flows around the throne of the Almighty swept down and vanquished him. But the Lord calleth early those he loves best to his eternal kingdom.'

'Amen, amen,' muttered the woman.

At the recital of the death of Kuma, the Matebela gave no sign of emotion, but great drops of dew gathered on his brow, and fell silently one by one on the folds of the old red blanket across his breast.

A silence deep and heavy hung for a few moments over the hot air of the room. The flood of yellow sunshine crept along the earthen floor until it touched the feet of the woman, weeping behind the folds of her apron. The child and the terrier were motionless, while the great black flies played with the moths, floating in and out of the wave of sunlight streaming in at the door.

‘It was in this wise his death was compassed,’ at length resumed the Boer, pulling sturdily at his great pipe. ‘One night a great storm swept over the veld. The wrath of the Almighty spoke in every volley of thunder, and we were sorely afraid. We knelt in prayer through all the night, begging God to stay His hand, and not swallow up the earth. Kuma was not with us; he was on the plain far away, where the veld was sweet and rich, tending our flock of sheep; but Kuma prayed in the wilderness, even as we did in the shelter of our indhlu, for, when the morning came, and I went forth to seek him and the flock, I found him

kneeling in the midst of the browsing sheep. My heart went up in a prayer of thanksgiving when I saw him worshipping our God, and I called his name, for I thought he must be weary and hungry. I called his name, but he answered not, and when I went up to him and touched him, I found that the messenger of the Almighty had been before me, for he was dead, struck by a shaft from the heavens; he had died the death of the righteous, died by the hand of the Almighty Himself.'

'Amen, amen,' whispered the woman.

The Matebela looked straight before him, his features showing no sign of what was in his mind; he might have been a block of black marble fashioned into a human being for all the evidence he gave of the effect of the Boer's story; but the little terrier, whose watchful gaze never left his face, saw his eyes overspread with a red film once or twice, and the nostrils of the broad, well-cut nose swell like those of a panting horse.

'And now I have finished the story of

good Kuma,' said the Boer, rising from the low stool and standing before the Matebela. 'I have told you the cause of my surprise on seeing you, the fright of my little son and the terror of my wife, for in your face we all see the face of Kuma. In your eyes we see the eyes of Kuma, and you have the form of Kuma. Had I not heard your voice I would have thought that the Almighty had sent us back our beloved Kuma, grown to manhood, to cheer us for the loss we have never forgotten, but you are not Kuma,' said the Boer with a sigh, while his wife echoed his words, 'You are not Kuma.'

'Kabo' (no), answered the Matebela, his deep voice full of suppressed feeling. 'Kabo. I am not Kuma, but I am his brother, and the spirit of our father, the great Mosilikatse, has guided me to your threshold, that I might gain tidings of all you have told me. I loved my brother, for he was the son of my mother's sister, and I was loth to take his heritage until I heard for myself the record of his death. I have heard, I have

departed secretly from my people, guided by the spirit of my father, in search of my brother. When the sun rose and bade me continue on my journey, I called on the spirit of my father to direct my steps as the beads of my anklets, worn by him in many a battle, pointed, and each day they have pointed to the south, but this morning they would not, and I have found what I sought.'

The woman uncovered her face at these words, and drew near the Matebela. The Boer listened quietly, but at the name of Kuma the child ran up to him, while the terrier barked at the well-known sound, for the voice of the Matebela had softened as it lingered over the name, until it seemed that it was indeed the voice of their beloved Kuma.

'I shall return to my Indunas, for I am indeed Inkosi!' (king), said he, rising and drawing up his great body to its utmost height, until his head touched the big brown rafters.

At these words the woman sped away into a recess in the shadows of the room, and returned carrying in her hand a bunch of copper bracelets and a small wooden knob-kerrie.

‘Take these, they are Kuma’s,’ she said. ‘They belong to his brother henceforth.’

When the eyes of the Matebela rested on them, his frame shook with emotion. Turning away, he covered his face with his blanket and wept.

‘The God of your nation send you many cows and sheep and rivers of uxualo!’ (wine), cried the Matebela, when he uncovered his face. ‘Wear this siluana’ (lion), he said, and he gave the child a bangle of beaten gold from his arm. ‘Wear this for the brother of Kuma, Inkosi of a hundred kraals and ten thousand warriors!’

The child caught the trinket with a cry of delight, while the mother’s eyes sparkled with tears at the eloquent words of the Matebela, given with a slow, musical chanting voice that was indescribably effective.

'Byater!' (your majesty), said the Boer simply, 'we thank you ; we bless the Almighty that He has given us the power to bring your dead brother, our beloved Kuma, to His saving grace. Would we might lead you in the same path.'

'Kabo!' cried the Matebela. 'Mena hamba! I go to the land of my people ; it is many days' march beyond the Unguza. The earth breeds gold, the treasure of the white man, and when I sit among my Indunas I shall tell them that I am the brother of the white man, that I kill only his enemies, that I give him the gold in my kopjes and in my deep rivers. All this I do for one who was a white man and loved my brother. I have spoken. Mena hamba, I go!'

The Boer and his little family watched the great Matebela stride across the veld and turn to the north. They watched until the tall figure, with its majestic bearing, became like a speck on the plains of the far horizon. Then the Boer stolidly resumed his smoking, and the wife began to prepare

the mid-day meal. But the child stole to the kopje and continued to watch with tear-dimmed eyes, while the terrier crouched beside him, and sighed disconsolately.

DIAMONDS TRUMPS

MRS PALMER was a power in the Diamond Camp. A shrewd little business woman, a kind-hearted, generous soul, and exceedingly handsome into the bargain; so you will not be surprised at the fact that in all that canvas town of miners, scalawags, black-legs and adventurers, driven thither by the sudden and wonderful find of diamonds, the little woman was held in high esteem, and was a veritable power. Her word was as good as her cheque any day—they had a bank in those early days of Kimberley—and she was an accommodating creditor to the many needy miners who thronged her cosy and well-appointed establishment. She was as good as she was shrewd, and strove to serve God and Mammon by closing her bar during service hours in the little shanty

which represented a chapel, just round the corner of the road, to the satisfaction of the good Fathers and the edification of the handful of women worshippers.

It was Sunday. One had just struck by the clock, and Mrs Palmer was putting the last touches to the bar, arranging a vase of flowers here and there, giving a few dainty rubs with her handkerchief across the surface of the already spotless mirror, previous to opening the doors to her thirsty customers, when she heard her name called softly.

‘Mrs Palmer—Tillie!’

Turning quickly, she beheld a shabby, travel-stained figure standing at the door leading from her own private parlour to the bar.

‘Billie?’ she cried, with a gasp and a blush. ‘You here? I thought you were in Cape Town.’

‘So I was, and so I am,’ answered Billie, softly. ‘Don’t open the door yet, I want to speak to you.’

Placing his finger on his lips to warn her

to keep silence, he beckoned her to come to him. Mrs Palmer obeyed, and, entering the little parlour, closed the door carefully upon them. Some minutes went by, while two or three impatient knocks were heard on the door of the bar, before Mrs Palmer reappeared. She was a trifle pale, but a pleased smile hovered round her lips, and a soft light shone in her eyes, as she hastened to the door, now quite vigorously besieged by repeated knocks. Suddenly she stopped and glanced at the clock, saw it was a quarter past one, and, going swiftly to it, she turned back the hands to one, and then went to the door, which she unlocked with a great show of surprise.

‘Well, you boys *are* thirsty,’ she cried; ‘you hardly gave me time to let you in, you are so punctual.’

‘Punctual?’ answered one. ‘Bless my stars, Mrs Palmer, you’re a quarter of an hour behind Sunday opening time.’

‘Indeed! Look at the clock,’ said Mrs Palmer, triumphantly.

‘Well, I’m blessed if my ticker isn’t wrong. I beg your pardon, Mrs Palmer.’

‘Oh, don’t mention it,’ answered Mrs Palmer, suavely. ‘Now, what will you gentlemen have to drink?’

The room was soon crowded with a motley assembly of diamond diggers, in every possible costume, from spruce morning suits to red flannel shirts and long boots. Mrs Palmer served all smilingly and quickly, taking no part in the talk, which was loud and excited. Occasionally she looked across the bar, through the door, to the long, red, dusty road stretching beyond, for a glimpse of her assistant who was behind time, but she betrayed no impatience other than serving her customers with unusual celerity. Presently a couple of men entered and sauntered to the bar. There was nothing unusual about their appearance, although the crowd unconsciously lowered their tones, and a shade of pallor overspread Mrs Palmer’s face, but it was gone as swiftly as it came as the men addressed her.

‘A whisky split, if y u please.’

She served the whisky promptly, with a steady hand and a charming smile.

‘Fine Sunday,’ said one, as he sipped his drink.

‘Yes, the rains have laid the dust a bit; good walking, isn’t it?’ answered Mrs Palmer, with another smile.

The larger of the two men returned her smile, as he said lazily,—

‘Yes. Any new arrivals, Mrs Palmer?’

‘Nothing worth speaking of; Sunday is always dull for business,’ replied Mrs Palmer, as she skilfully uncorked a bottle of champagne and proceeded to serve a Jew boy, attired in a particularly loud suit of tweed.

‘That’s little Mike,’ whispered the smaller of the two men.

‘Have a drink of fizz, captain?’ cried the subject of the whisper, as he pushed the bottle toward the big man.

The man eyed him keenly beneath the broad brim of his hat, as he drawled out,—

‘Thank you, Mike; I believe I will.’

‘Two more tumblers, Mrs Palmer, if you please.’

The tumblers were placed before him, and, with much chaff and laughter, Mike proceeded to fill them from the foaming bottle.

‘Well, here’s to you!’ said Mike, lifting the brimming glass to his lips.

The men nodded and drank off the wine, while Mike laid down his tumbler, and, taking up the bottle, was about to replenish all three, when a clumsy fellow just behind gave him an awkward dig in the back with his elbow, and sent the bottle flying out of Mike’s hand to the floor.

‘Holy Moses! but you are a duffer; there’s half a bottle of fizz wasted,’ cried Mike, as he picked up the bottle and placed it on the bar.

‘I beg your pardon,’ said the fellow, gruffly. ‘Open another, Mrs Palmer; I’ll pay for it.’

The two men laughed, the Jew boy laughed, and Mrs Palmer laughed as she removed the bottle, at what was considered a huge joke on the rough-looking fellow, who put down the

money without another word, and strode out of the place.

The three men grew quite confidential over their wine, and finally left the bar together, but not before Mrs Palmer's keen ear had caught the words—

‘That's the best thing you can do, Mike ; tell us all you know and clear yourself.’

As the afternoon wore on, the crowd in the bar gradually disappeared, and when the time for closing arrived, Mrs Palmer released her assistant, saying,—

‘You can go home to tea, Miss Allen ; the evening is so fine and you might like a bit of fresh air. We have had a busy afternoon.’

‘Thank you,’ rejoined Miss Allen, delighted with her release. ‘I won't be longer than an hour.’

The assistant out of the way, Mrs Palmer proceeded to act very strangely. She wrapped an empty champagne bottle in several towels, and with a small hammer crushed it noiselessly and completely. Removing the wrappings, she carefully examined the broken bottle, extracting

a few bits of dull-coloured stones. The second bottle, for which the unlucky stranger had paid, received the same treatment with the same results, a few stones rewarding her search. Next the water of a sink under the counter, in which the tumblers were washed, was carefully strained through a tiny sieve, and a goodly quantity of similar dull-coloured stones discovered, which Mrs Palmer placed with the others in a small canvas bag concealed in the ample folds of lace adorning her bosom. The next step was to conceal the broken bottles, which was done by removing two bottles of champagne from their straw casings and depositing the broken bottles in their place. Then the bottles were uncorked, and, with a sigh over the waste, Mrs Palmer poured the contents into the little sink of water and deposited them among the rest of the empty bottles under the counter. All this occupied but a few moments, and was accomplished none too soon, for Mrs Palmer had scarcely finished wiping her hands when the two men, who had left with the Jew boy Mike a few hours

previously, entered, followed by a brace of constables.

‘We’re sorry to trouble you, Mrs Palmer,’ began the big man; ‘but we must ask you to let us search the bar. We’re after some stolen diamonds, and have reason to believe they may have been dropped here.’

‘Certainly,’ answered Mrs Palmer, promptly. I shall be glad to give you any assistance I can. Where do you wish to look?’

‘Well, that we don’t exactly know; we have arrested a fellow who was drinking here to-day, and found a diamond on him. He must have got rid of the rest somehow or other. May we examine the empty bottles?’

‘Certainly. Come behind the counter,’ said Mrs Palmer. ‘My assistant has gone to tea. Shall I send for her; she may be of some use?’

‘No, thank you; we can find out in a moment if the fellow left any behind.’

‘Whatever made you think of looking for diamonds in the empty bottles?’ exclaimed Mrs Palmer, laughingly.

‘Mike Abrams gave us the hint,’ answered the man, as he carefully examined the innocent-looking champagne bottles. ‘He said it was more than likely that the stones would be got rid of in that way.’

‘Mike said that? Well, he ought to know; he knows more about the tricks of diamond jumpers than anyone else, I suppose,’ observed Mrs Palmer, as she shook an empty whisky bottle vigorously.

At last the search was given up as useless, and the men and constables departed with profuse thanks to Mrs Palmer for her obliging assistance.

When they had gone, Mrs Palmer sank into a chair and burst into tears, a state in which the assistant found her, and which she sought to quiet by prevailing on her mistress to retire for a little rest, which would soon set her right again—advice promptly acted upon by the distressed Mrs Palmer.

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It was long after midnight when Mrs Palmer was relieved from her watch by hearing a low

tap at the window of her little parlour behind the bar. She had been waiting patiently many hours for the signal, and now her heart beat fast and her eyes sparkled as she cautiously unlocked the door and peered out. The night was very dark, the moon had set early, and the stars were blotted out by the heavy clouds. A gust of wind blew the soft rain into her face as she called in a whisper,—

‘Is that you, Billie?’

‘Yes,’ answered a voice in the darkness; ‘here I am. Everything all right?’

‘Come in,’ whispered Mrs Palmer, nervously. ‘I’m getting wet.’

Catching him by the hand, she drew him in, and, closing the door, locked it securely with key and bolt.

The pretty room looked very inviting in the soft glow of the lamp, but not more so than its mistress, thought Billie, as he divested himself of a greatcoat and dropped into an easy-chair near the table. The lamp light shone on his face, which was round and pleasant, and ornamented by a silky, flaxen

moustache, quite concealing the coarse, sensual lips; a pair of eyeglasses imparted a certain air of distinction to his face, and his manner was that of one accustomed to command. On the whole, he appeared a thoroughly successful man.

‘Give me a kiss, Tillie,’ he said, drawing her down on his knee; ‘and tell me how you have managed that little business.’

‘Capitally, dear,’ answered Mrs Palmer, emphasising her words with a caress.

‘You’re a regular brick, Tillie!’ he exclaimed. ‘What don’t I owe to you? You’re the best friend I ever had.’

‘And I’m proud of you, Billie. You are a nice slick boy, to be sure—ha! ha! it does seem funny that the ragged fellow I took in to wash up and sweep out the bar when I had only a little canvas tent, and the boys were sleeping on the veld beside their claims, should be one of the first men in the colony now; but’—here she suddenly became serious—‘you must leave off this diamond jumping, Billie; you’re rich enough now, and don’t need it.’

‘I know, Tillie, you’re right; but I love the excitement—it clings to me like mad. Why, I felt as happy as a lark when I got away from Cape Town a week ago and trekked it up here. I met lots of men who knew me, but not a soul of them saw through my disguise. And then the fun of lying about in the dark right under the noses of those stupid mine watchmen. And Mike, he’s a treasure—such nerve and pluck.’

‘You’re right there, Billie. I was that frightened, I could scarcely stand when those detectives came into the bar this afternoon. How Mike was ever going to get the diamonds into my hands then, the dear Lord alone knew; but when he called for the champagne right before their faces, and invited them to drink, I felt steadier, for I knew he would manage it. Well, it’s all over; but I never want to pass such a Sunday again.’

‘My brave Tillie,’ said Billie, soothingly; ‘just you wait and see your reward. But how about the diamonds—have you got them with you? I must be going soon, in order to get

out of Camp before daybreak. Let me have them.'

'Yes, the diamonds are safe here,' said Mrs Palmer, rising from his knee and placing her hand on her breast. 'You may have them, Billie; but you've got to keep your promise and take *me* with them. You've got to marry me before I part with them.'

And he did.

THE UBIQUITOUS JEW BOY

PART I

HE was an interesting phase of a great people who have suffered and conquered through the mere force of endurance.

A distinct type of the men who are moulded into what is superficially termed a gentleman—in so far as money can make one, by the unaccountable freaks of luck.

A regular up-to-date Jew boy, a species rarely found outside of South Africa, and then only incidently in the vast Hebrew contingent of American society. He was a wondrous product of the crucible of the gold and diamond fields, wherein he went a poor, half-starved Jew, with nothing but his wits, and from which he emerged quite a different

specimen, with a golden veneer of riches, as far removed from any resemblance to a son of the Whitechapel Ghetto, as a swan is to the egg that hatched it, or a diamond to the blue clay from which it was rescued.

Of weak points he had not a few, but he had likewise his good ones, although both were in such curious juxtaposition that it was oftentimes a puzzle to distinguish the good from the bad.

He was as stupid as he was witty, as generous as he was penurious, at once refined, vulgar, lazy and energetic betimes; always an enthusiastic lover of art in the direction of music and the beautiful, but more so when the beautiful took the form of a woman or a diamond.

For sport he had a profound contempt; aside from horses, he knew nothing of it, and cared less; but in the matter of horses his judgment went no further than the selection of sound and showy ones for his carriages, and running a racer for the sake of the profits and the notoriety

Never dominated by circumstances, he was thoroughly independent of his surroundings ; the time and place never made him, but he made it. His swagger was superb in its blending of good-humoured insolence and wary discreetness. No man knew better how to hold his tongue and affect an air of wisdom on a subject of which he was ignorant. He would smile blandly, with an inscrutable expression, behind his gold-rimmed eyeglasses when the waters of intellectual converse grew too deep for him, whilst, on the other hand, he was never at a loss where a certain flow of common-place wit was concerned.

But the thing which impressed you most, was the conscious air of prosperity which he constantly wore, and which proclaimed the fact that he never forgot for a moment—I was going to say sleeping or waking—that he was born into the world for the sole and supreme purpose of—‘making money.’

Under these circumstances he had, very naturally, a large number of friends. A

numerous following, composed of Jew boys like himself, and well they knew how to fawn upon and flatter him whilst they joyfully accepted the favours which he doled out with a discriminating hand.

The leaven of the Jews of old was still strong within him ; it fed with ever-increasing strength his deep and secret contempt for the Gentile, whose women he coveted, and whose good fellowship he bought with his gold.

Yet there was, strange to say, one thing lacking to complete this specimen type of the ubiquitous Jew boy up-to-date, and that one thing was his name. He was still enough of the old-fashioned Jew of a quarter of a century ago to change his family patronym, which savoured strongly of the purlieus of Petticoat Lane, to a high-sounding title which matched his high-stepping horses and still higher good fortune.

Since he had become, in the parlance of that odoriferous section of Cockney Judea from which he hailed, a "blumin millionaire,"

he repudiated the venerable and honourable Hebrew name of Abraham with its sacred traditions for a more Christianised one, whilst the revered family name of Isaacs was replaced by an aristocratic cognomen. Unlike those of his simpler brethren of the shool, who were content, when they had grown out of the chrysalis of Petticoat Lane into the full-winged butterfly of prosperity, to sink their past identity in such respectable though common-place names as that of Robinson, Davis or Smith, our particular Jew boy proudly displayed on his visiting card the euphonious title of—

MR LAWRENCE REGINALD LA MONTE.

If his old time friends of the Kimberley diggings winked slyly, finger on nose, at the innovation, the redoubtable 'Larry,' as he was soon dubbed, winked back in the same jocose spirit, knowing well that his people understood and tacitly approved of the new name, which was, in his case, as in their own, the

right thing for business, whereas in the Ghetto, whose gates they had erected in the Golden City, he was still known as Abe Isaacs, the son of old Jacob Isaacs, one time Shommas of the Whitechapel shool.

By right of his royal title of King of the Diamond Fields, it follows that he was the Prince of the Ubiquitous Jew Boys, since his was the first finger in every money-making scheme in those halcyon days, when gold ran like rivers, so to speak, in the streets of Kimberley and Johannesburg.

One morning, Mr Lawrence Reginald la Monte, whom, for purposes of brevity, we will call henceforth Larry, was sauntering along the dusty, unpaved road known as Commissioner Street, on his way to the Stock Exchange, which in those early days was a big, barn-like structure of wood and iron, whose every square inch might have represented a like complement of gold, so huge were the fortunes made in the gold market beneath its ugly, unadorned roof.

The morning was fine but exceedingly

warm, and the light breeze raised a small whirlpool of red dust now and then around his feet. But Larry took no heed of the layer of red dust, which had already begun to disfigure his patent leather shoes and sprinkle the bottom of his light trousers, for the reason that he felt in particularly good spirits that sunny morning.

His smile was as sweet as the red rose in his buttonhole as he cogitated over the run of luck which had pursued him since his advent in Johannesburg a few months previous. He was now master of the gold market, with the prospect of annexing a goodly slice of the largest mine on the main reef, which would go to balance that other big slice out of the Kimberley cake. A prospect which, if it did not set his pulses throbbing faster, as in former days, filled him with a glow of contented complacency akin to the pleasure experienced by a boa - constrictor after he has just swallowed an unsuspecting friend.

The distance was short between Larry's abode—a sumptuous caravansary, replete with

every luxury that money could command, save water and gaslight—and the Stock Exchange; but not too short for Larry to encounter a host of stockbrokers all eager to pay court to him. Larry returned their effusive greetings with his bland smile, but passed leisurely on, leaving behind him the fragrance of a fine havanna to console them in lieu of the expected tip.

‘La Monte is on the lay for something big to-day,’ quoth one disappointed Jew boy to another, who winked knowingly as he replied,—

‘Yes. Larry don’t put on that swagger for nothing. Just you keep your eye on him on ’Change this morning. There’ll be a boom on soon, as sure as my name’s Ike Tobias!’

Meanwhile, Larry approached the Bodega, a resort for delectable drinks. It was another curious structure of the hybrid style of building peculiar to the Rand just opposite the Exchange. Larry was usually quite abstemious during the morning, but the heat was already so great that he felt the need of a cool drink,

With his mind made up not to tarry long over the fascinating beverages, in the shape of iced cup, for which the principal barmaid of the Bodega was famous, he was about to push open the swinging doors, when a vigorous whack on the shoulder, followed by a loud voice, startled him.

‘I say, Abe, how you was?’ exclaimed the voice in a broad, Whitechapel accent.

Larry faced about with alacrity, indignant at the familiar blow; but when he heard his old name called in such jocose tones he lost all affectation of indignation and haughtiness whilst he stared in astonishment at the man before him, who, on his side, returned Larry’s scrutiny with grinning assurance.

There could be no possible mistake about the status of Larry’s unknown friend. Jew was writ large all over him, from the glossy, kinking, jet black hair and big nose, to the flashy suit of check tweed and flaming neck-tie.

The stranger was as different in appearance to Larry as could be imagined. The fair hair

and skin, together with a nose just snub enough to escape a suspicion of Judaism, rendered Larry secure from any such imputation. But the other had an atmosphere of coster and fried fish about him that would, aside from his unctuous voice, have convinced the most unsuspecting.

Larry took all this in with one swift glance, and resolved instantly to get this young Jew and his loud voice out of the way until he knew something more of one who evidently knew who and what he was. His quick eye took in the fact that no one was near enough to overhear what had been said, and, actuated by a mingled curiosity and prudence, he said in his suavest tones,—

‘I fear you have the advantage of me, but if you will step this way, I shall be glad to know if I can be of any service to you.’

Larry’s manner over-awed the boisterous speech on the young man’s lips, and without another word he followed him around the corner of the street and into a narrow lane, directly behind the Bodega, to a small canteen built

of a mixture of canvas and old boards, which had done service as packing cases.

Larry quickly entered the little shanty, which consisted of one room, with a bar-counter at the end, and a few tables and chairs scattered about. Here Larry was sure of being undisturbed by any of his swell *confrères* on' Change, and secure from all intrusion. The frowsy young woman behind the bar knew him only too well, and understood the look which he gave her as he entered, and instantly obeyed by adroitly locking the door whilst Larry politely proffered his companion a chair, taking the precaution, however, to present the one with its back to the door.

The young Jew, still under the influence of Larry's grand air, silently sat down, but regained his grin as Larry ordered a couple of whiskies.

'Now, my young fellow, what is it you've brought? Pan them out, and be quick about it; I have no time to lose.'

Larry spoke brusquely; his airy manner had entirely disappeared, and he glowered at the

young man somewhat after the fashion he used towards the Kaffirs, who occasionally met him in the same shanty for the purpose of relieving themselves of a valuable but perilous commission, from which they went away well rewarded.

This abrupt change in Larry's manner seemed, for some occult reason, to tickle his companion greatly, and he burst into loud and prolonged laughter.

'Come—enough of that nonsense,' cried Larry, angrily, 'to business. What have you brought?'

A mask seemed to have fallen from Larry's face, revealing the determined and unscrupulous man of devious ways and means of acquiring wealth, whether by fair means or foul. He regarded the young man on the other side of the table as an emissary from one of his numerous agents scattered over the colony and the Transvaal, whereby he worked his secret schemes of illicit money making.

Larry's speech seemed to aggravate instead of silence the young man, who only laughed the louder, as though it was some huge joke,

until his assurance began to fill Larry with vague feelings of alarm, whilst his insolent laughter roused the latent temper of the Diamond King. But Larry was too wary to show any of that ugly temper which he affected to hide under a show of treating the whole affair in a rough, business-like manner.

On the other side of the table a spirit of perplexity began to take the place of amusement, which prompted the young Jew to drop suddenly into silence and stare at Larry, a proceeding which provoked Larry almost beyond the bounds of patience.

The young Jew spread his elbows on the table, and, resting his chin on his hands, said slowly and impressively,—

‘Why, don’t you know me, Abe? I’m your Aunt Sara Levi’s youngest son!’

Larry recovered himself instantly, and, reaching across the table, shook the young man by the shoulders, as he cried with a laugh,—

‘Of course I knew you. I was only giving you a bit of chaff. You are Jacob Levi, who

was little more than a kid when I left London. Shake hands. Of course I know you. Welcome, my cousin, to the gold-fields!’

Jacob Levi grasped the proffered hand with eagerness, and shook it heartily, although he could not resist saying in a tone of resentment,—

‘Abe, I was afraid you was going to deny your own mother’s brother’s son—eh, Abe?’

‘Nonsense!’ cried Larry. ‘I’ll make that all right; you won’t have cause to regret coming to me. When did you come to the Rand? What are you doing, and why did you not let me know you were here?’

Larry put these questions to his new-found kinsman, more to gain time to study the young Jew than through any motives of interest in him, it being his object to set him talking the better to sound him.

‘Oh! I’m here over a month. I came out for old Samuel’s furniture business. It is a great place in Cheapside now. The old man heard of the boom in Johannesburg, and he

thought, as there would be lots of people coming over, he'd better send me to start a business on the hire system—good place for big profits and quick returns—of the furniture.'

Jacob laughed and winked, but Larry made no answer further than to nod and smile.

'So I left London two months ago, and sailed on the *Drummond Castle*, but I made my fare back by sweepstakes. Oh! it was a jolly trip—pocketed the gold—saw a bit of life at the Cape and Kimberley, and here I am; but you see I didn't know you were in Johannesburg, cousin Abe Isaacs, so, of course, I couldn't let you know I was here—eh?'

Larry's eyes assumed their well-known inscrutable expression as he answered in his smoothest and most insinuating tones,—

'Why, of course not; but where are you stopping?'

'Oh! I hang out with a friend of father's. He has a nice tidy shanty at Jeppestown. He has put me up until I find a place for the business, and then I'll live in the shop.'

‘That’s a good plan—er—what’s your friend’s name? Do I know him?’

‘He’s a son of old Reb Guadelha of Sinai shool. He is called Sol, and knows your father well. He’ll be glad to know you are here, and to see you.’

‘Ah!’ said Larry, still more blandly, ‘you have told him about your poor cousin.’

‘Oh, no! not a word,’ Jacob replied. ‘How could I when I didn’t even know you were in Johannesburg; but I’ll tell him now—eh?’

‘Certainly,’ answered Larry, with apparent heartiness. ‘Are you—er—are you alone, Jake?’

The young Jew laughed, whilst a tinge of deepest colour appeared in his cheek as he answered shyly,—

‘Yes; at present.’

‘Oh! then you are engaged?’ said Larry, extending his hand. ‘Let me congratulate you.’

‘Thank you,’ replied Jacob, grasping the hand; ‘but it will not come off soon, unless I get on quicker than I do at present. Rebecca’s father swears he’ll not let us put

our noses under the canopy until I have a good start in business, and make a few hundred pounds.'

'Is that all?' rejoined Larry. 'Well, you can send for her as soon as you wish. I'll look round for a business for you; one where you'll make more money in an hour than you would in a month at the furniture business.'

'Will you, Abe?' cried the young Jew in delight. 'Why, I'll—I'll lick your boots for you. I'll work like a Kaffir for you.'

'Tut, tut! I will not expect anything like that,' said Larry, well pleased with the manner in which Jacob received his offer of help. 'I only wish to see a kinsman of mine prosperous and respected. I have a great many important business schemes on hand, in which you can be useful to me and profitable to yourself; but you must change that loud rig-out, I wish you to look like a gentleman. Here is a tenner; rig yourself up in a neat suit of dark clothes—no more red neck-tie—and a handsome digger's sombrero, and meet me here at nine-thirty to-morrow morning.'

Jacob seized the bank note with both hands ; for the moment he was overcome with surprise and pleasure. Here, indeed, was a stroke of good fortune in the guise of a new-found relative, who was rich enough to throw him tenners like another would a quid.

When he found his voice it was to pour forth a torrent of thanks in broken English and Yiddish, which sent a thrill of recollections through Larry's heart, since it was many and many a day since he had heard the Ghetto language of his early years.

'There, that's enough, Jake,' he said, with a gratified smile, as he arose and looked at his jewelled watch. 'I have lost nearly an hour and a quarter now. I must be off.'

The sparkling stones set so lavishly in Larry's timepiece were not lost on Jacob. The sight made his mouth fairly water.

At the door Larry paused and said carelessly,—

'Don't tell Sol Guadelha that you have seen me. Keep our business to yourself.'

'Oh, you can trust me, Abe. I'll keep

mum,' cried Jacob, with an earnestness that assured Larry he would keep his word.

'That's right; mum's the word,' rejoined Larry, edging by Jake and adroitly turning the key in the door. 'Oh! I have forgotten to settle for the drinks,' he said, turning back. 'Don't wait for me, Jake; go ahead and remember to-morrow at nine-thirty!'

When the door closed on Jacob, there was a moment's pause as Larry listened to his retreating footsteps, then he turned to the young woman behind the bar, as she reappeared on the scene, having discreetly retired during the foregoing interview.

'No palaver with that young fellow when he comes to-morrow morning,' he said, curtly. 'Show him to a table if I am not here at nine-thirty, and keep outsiders off!'

'All right, Mr La Monte,' replied the bar-maid, 'I'll be mum!'

'So mum seems to be the word to-day. I'll open a bottle of Mumm for luck,' thought Larry, as he let himself in by a small door, hidden behind the screen of the bar, into the

Bodega, which adjoined the canteen, back to back.

The bar of that showy establishment was filled by a crowd of excited brokers. The appearance of Larry was the signal for an outburst of cries, and in a moment he was the centre of an enthusiastic crowd of men, all shouting together.

‘Larry! Larry! the market’s rising in leaps and bounds!’ ‘A boom is on—’ ‘Yes, and by God it’s going to be a big one!’ were some of the more temperate of the exclamations to which Larry listened, as he leaned against the bar, cool and smiling.

‘Boom or no boom, I am going to have a bottle of Mumm, and want you all to join me. Open a case!’ he said to the beaming barmaid, and as he raised the brimming glass to his lips he cried, ‘Drink, one and all; here’s to the boom!’

PART II

The next morning, punctually at the appointed hour, Jacob Levi presented himself

at the canteen behind the Bodega. He was promptly admitted by the stolid-faced barmaid, who, under the pretext of sweeping the dusty stoop, had been on the look-out for him.

If she was surprised at the young Jew's altered appearance, she gave no sign of it as she directed him to a table, and inquired what he would have to drink.

'Nothing, thank you,' replied Jacob, as he proceeded to light a cigarette. 'I'll wait for the Boss.'

The girl moved away, but Jacob tried to detain her for a chat—an advance she curtly repulsed by disappearing behind the bar, where she appeared to be so busy that Jacob gave up the attempt.

Decidedly Jacob had improved in appearance. The fashionable suit of dark blue material, supplemented by a white silk blouse fastened by a broad waistband of black silk, and the handsome sombrero, adorned by the typical silk handkerchief of rich but quiet colours wound round the crown, and which was set

jauntily on his well-oiled, curly locks, transformed him into a specimen of the comely class of prosperous Jew boys which abound in Johannesburg.

Finding there was no amusement to be got out of the sulky barmaid, he leaned back in his chair and prepared to indulge in a pleasant reverie whilst awaiting Larry's arrival, quite unconscious that the eyes of Larry were at that moment scrutinising him through a hole in the screen behind the bar.

'Good morning, Jake ; sorry to keep you waiting !'

He started at the sound of Larry's voice, and looked round, to behold him standing at his elbow.

'I didn't see you come in !' cried Jacob, in some surprise at Larry's sudden appearance.

'No ?' replied Larry, as he took the opposite chair. 'Well, here I am. You seem pleased with yourself, and I don't blame you ; why, I scarcely knew you, quite an improvement that new outfit !'

‘I rather think so myself,’ replied Jacob, with an air of good-humoured pride. ‘What’ll you have to drink?’

‘Nothing that you can afford to pay for at present,’ said Larry, laughing at the assurance of his *protége*. ‘Bring a small bottle of that ’87,’ he called to the barmaid, who promptly brought the wine, and when she had opened it, again discreetly withdrew as on the day previous.

Over the sparkling champagne, Larry at once proceeded to business in his usual wary manner, by putting a question to his young kinsman in order to sound him deeper than on the previous morning.

‘Seen anything of Sol?’ he began.

‘Oh, yes; but I say, Abe!’ exclaimed Jacob, as a look of perplexity crossed his features, ‘what do you think! Why, he swore you were not in Johannesburg, and attempted to bully me over the matter. He said there was no one of your name in Camp, and said he ought to know, as he’d been here nearly six months.

‘Did you mention our appointment for this morning,’ interrupted Larry in cold tones, whilst a sudden frown almost displaced his eyeglasses.

‘Oh, no,’ eagerly cried Jacob, who noted both tone and frown. ‘Not me—you know the last word you said was—mum’s the word, and I kept my mouth shut about our business.’

‘Then how came you to ever mention the name of Abe Isaacs to Sol?’

‘Well, you see, it was this way,’ began Jacob, in a conciliatory tone, and with a humble look that almost disarmed Larry’s anger, ‘I wanted to hear all the news and casually remarked to Sol that I would like to find my cousin Abe Isaacs, as I heard he was somewhere in the Transvaal or Free State. Sol said he knew everyone in Camp, but that there was no Abe Isaacs here, or he would have heard of it. I told him it wasn’t likely he knew everyone, and he got hot and went for me till I nearly let the cat out of the bag. Besides,’ continued Jacob, when

he had fortified his courage with another glass of champagne. 'Sol riled me awful by sneering at your father, old Ikey, and then he said, "That dirty little shaver who used to sell matches round the Mansion House and Cheapside—him in Johannesburg! not much; he couldn't get the tin to keep him in London, and how was he to get to the gold-fields, then? I was that mad, Larry,' resumed Jacob, when he had delivered this speech with embellishments of voice and gesture in imitation of Sol, and which filled Larry with a deep and sullen hatred against Sol, which to this day has never abated, 'I was that raged, that for twopence I would have brought him here this day and let him see for himself, the dirty Jew, what a swell you had become, and I ached to throw his lies down his throat, but I didn't dare break my word to you.'

'You did right, Jake, for the consequences would not have been pleasant for you, as you would not have found me here had you brought him.'

Larry said this very slowly and with much repressed feeling. He called for another bottle of the wine, and after drinking a glass, which Jacob noticed brought back the colour to his cheeks, said in a low voice,—

‘I might as well tell you straight that Sol was right in saying he never heard Abe Isaac’s name in Johannesburg—in fact, no one else has ever heard it, or of him either, in Camp!’

‘Wot you a-givin’ me?’ cried Jacob, dropping into the old Whitechapel vernacular at Larry’s amazing avowal.

‘It is a fact,’ replied Larry, as he drew from his coat pocket a richly-decorated card case, from which he took a card and passed it to his companion.

‘That is the name by which I am known now.’

Jake took the card and gazed at the neat superscription with no little curiosity. When he ran his eye over the name, the effect was truly remarkable; if an electric shock had passed through Jacob’s supple body it would not have produced more astonishing results. His eyes opened to double their normal size,

his hands trembled violently, while his face grew white and then red again, as, with open mouth, he read the magical name of

‘MR LAWRENCE REGINALD LA MONTE.’

‘What! the great Diamond King?’ he murmured at last, in an awed whisper; ‘the great Diamond King?—and him my own cousin, son of my own mother’s brother, Ikey Isaacs? And to think I have had the cheek to talk to him like a pal. Oh, what a duffer I was not to know it! Will you excuse all my impudence—will you?’ cried Jake, in a voice choked with tears as he extended his hands imploringly to Larry, who was all the while placidly sipping at his wine, enjoying to the very marrow of his proud heart the tearful homage of his young kinsman, whose every cringing word of apology was like balm to his wounded vanity.

He forgot the insolence of Jacob, who had accepted his favours as a matter of course, and so readily claimed kinship with him in such open and impudent fashion.

Never before had homage paid to his name

tasted sweeter, and it was in a very exultation of gratified pride and soothed vanity that he took the young Jew's hand, and said, with genuine emotion,—

‘Say no more, Jacob, you are my kinsman, and that is enough to excuse everything you have said or done. You are my cousin, and I wish to help you, but you must be a credit to me, and a true, staunch friend; for, rich and great as I am, I need a true friend near me. I have only one other, and that is my wife!’

Jacob had no words to say, his heart was full to overflowing—with an impulsive gesture he buried his face in his hands and wept aloud. €

Larry kept quiet. There was something like tears in his own eyes; at all events, he had to remove his glasses once or twice and submit them to a gentle rubbing with his handkerchief before he was able to see Jacob on the other side of the table. The young Jew was pouring out a torrent of Yiddish ejaculations as fast as his tears flowed. But there is an end to everything, and so there was to Jacob's emotion.

When he was thoroughly composed, Larry unfolded to him his plan, which Jacob found to consist of a change of name as well as abode and occupation.

‘With that name you can pass muster on ’Change, and when I have you elected a member you can do me good service on the other side of the market.’

.

It was some weeks before Sol Guadelha and Jacob met. It was in Commissioner Street one morning, when Sol had left his cheap-jack shop for a previous engagement across Market Square.

‘There’s Jake Levi!’ he cried to a friend who had stopped him for a chat. ‘I haven’t seen him for a month of Sabbaths. I want to hear if he has found his cousin, Abe Isaacs, yet.’

‘Who are you talking about?’ said the other. ‘That’s Mr Montague Pierpont, one of the swell Jew boys that Larry la Monte introduced to the market recently.’

‘Mr Montague Pierpont!’ ejaculated Sol. ‘By the blood of Moses, I swear it’s Jake Levi

from Whitechapel. Don't I know all his family ?'

'Well, if you know him so well, go and speak to him. That's Larry la Monte that has just joined him. You'd better go, Sol; perhaps he'll introduce you to the great Diamond King,' sneered the other, as he sauntered away with a laugh at his friend's discomfiture.

Sol remained rooted to the spot; the name of Larry la Monte had so overawed him that he turned and slunk off to his shop, wondering at the luck of some mortals, and yet little dreaming that Larry and Abe Isaacs were one and the same person.

He never again dared to claim acquaintance-ship with the rising young broker and bosom friend of Larry la Monte, the dashing Mr Montague Pierpont, whose wedding a few months later was the sensation of the Camp.

But then, you see, dear reader, Sol was one of the old-fashioned Jews, humble, devout and self-respecting, loving, with dog-like devotion, the old faith and customs of his race, content to live up to every letter of the law of Moses.

Mr Montague Pierpont prospered and grew famous, the envy of many and the unfailing friend of more of his ken, the ever-increasing army of Jew boys, with a hundred virtues, but still that one fault which, to the end of the chapter, will constitute the makings of the Ubiquitous Jew Boy.

THE END

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